

Folly Roger's Anarchist Values

Free Spirits



*(from the writings of
five anarchists
sentenced to death for
their anarchy)*

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This book is essentially a political manifesto. It encompasses an appraisal of the critique of social and political circumstances by four French anarchists and one Italian anarchist operating in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and who were all sentenced to death by the French state for living according to the dictates of anarchy as they understood and lived it. These men are Ravachol, Auguste Vaillant, Émile Henry, Sante Caserio and Clément Duval. This book, sharing and analysing their understanding of their circumstances, will go on to discuss their openly espoused and lived values and how we should live in a way they thought in accord with the liberty promised by anarchy.

But you should not imagine that because this book is to repeat, analyse and even promote the words of some old Frenchmen and an old Italian, now all long dead, that this book is therefore an irrelevance. To the contrary, their words, coming from the misery of past capitalist industrial conditions in one of the richest and imagined foremost democracies in the world, are STILL RELEVANT TODAY for their analyses - and their remedies were exactly on point and have never been seriously addressed by those who form, or seek to form, governments, or the wider political spectrum of people who make up such democracies. The point of this book, and the reason for writing it, is then that these men made sense in their own time and they still make sense now. We need to hear their sense again.

All of the men I will refer to became outraged by the economic, political and social conditions of their time. This led all of them to become active anarchists in their locales

and to engage in so-called illegal and violent acts. (I will not be giving very detailed biographies here. You can easily research the lives and histories of each of these men for yourselves if that's what you want to do.) I neither seek to excuse nor justify them for their violence and illegality and none of them would care for my, or your, approval or disdain in regard to it in any case. They were all men who acted for and from themselves, believing that anarchy dissolves away to nothing bourgeois beliefs in state-derived duty and to either civil obedience or entirely artificial morality. They were men who took responsibility for their actions without dishonesty and as those who understood this as an anarchist virtue. What is important from the point of view of this book, however, is the reasons they gave for doing these things and the contextual analyses they provided in their explanations of their necessity. It is from these I am going to distill the "anarchist values" this book aims to showcase and be about. As I do not intend this book to be overly long, and I do intend it to be pretty much to the point, I shall cut straight to the chase and begin by discussing Ravachol.

Ravachol

Claudius Koenigstein (better known as Ravachol, his mother's surname), was put to death by the French state in July 1892 when he was in his early thirties. His crimes included planting two bombs at the premises of officials connected to a corrupt trial of three anarchists who had been savagely and illegally beaten by police after being arrested at a celebration of International Workers' Day. For this he received a long prison sentence. But at a subsequent trial he was sentenced to death (at this time in France this was administered by guillotine) for three separate murders, only one of which he admitted to, the murder of an elderly recluse in the act of burglary. Ravachol was never a

rich man and from being a child under ten years old had to go out to find paying work to help support his mother, siblings and even a further extended family relation. In addition to this, he would rob graves to make ends meet.

I have two documentary sources to present in relation to Ravachol and his reasonings for his direct and violent actions and they will serve well to introduce what anarchists of his day imagined their context was in a place such as France and supply the requisite anarchist analysis of circumstances and appropriate responses to them. The first document here is called "My Principles" and was supposedly dictated to police after Ravachol's imprisonment for the bombings and the second is his defence speech at the subsequent murder trial. My consistent method here will be to present each document in turn, breaking it down into pertinent clauses or points in between (perhaps with commentary) in order to clarify the details in pursuance of my own analytical interpretation of what is being said by the speaker. At the end of this process, and having dealt with the ideas of all the personalities, I will be able to produce my own analysis and interpretation of the whole.

My Principles (Ravachol)

"The above named, after having eaten his fill, spoke to us as follows:

'Messieurs, it is my habit, wherever I am, to do propaganda work. Do you know what anarchism is?' We answered 'No' to this question. 'This doesn't surprise me,' he responded. 'The working class which, like you, is forced to work to earn its bread, doesn't have the time to devote to the reading of pamphlets they're given. It's the same for you. Anarchy is the

obliteration of property. There currently exist many useless things; many occupations are useless as well, for example, accounting. With anarchy there is no more need for money, no further need for bookkeeping and the other forms of employment that derive from this. There are currently too many citizens who suffer while others swim in opulence, in abundance. This situation cannot last; we all should profit by the surplus of the rich; but even more obtain, like them, all that is necessary. In current society, it isn't possible to arrive at this goal. Nothing, not even a tax on income, could change the face of things.

Nevertheless, the bulk of workers think that if we acted in this way, things would improve. It is an error to think this way. If we tax the landlord, he'll increase his rents and in this way will arrange for those who suffer to pay the new charges imposed on them. In any event, no law can touch landlords for, being the masters of their goods, we can't prevent them from doing whatever they want with them. What, then, should be done? Wipe out property and, by doing this, wipe out those who take all. If this abolition takes place, we have to also do away with money, in order to prevent any idea of accumulation, which would force a return to the current regime. It is in effect money that is the cause of all discord, all hatred, of all ambitions; it is, in a word, the creator of property. This metal, in truth, has nothing but an agreed upon price, born of its rarity. If we were no longer obliged to give something in exchange for those things we need to live, gold would lose its value and no one would seek it. Nor could they enrich themselves, because nothing they would amass could serve them in obtaining a better life than that of others. There would then no longer be any need of laws, no need of masters. As for religions, they'd be destroyed, because their moral influence would no longer have any reason for existence. There would no longer be the absurdity of believing in a God who doesn't exist, since after death everything is finished.

So we should hold fast to life, but when I say life I mean life, which does not mean slaving all day to make the bosses fat and, while dying oneself of hunger, become the authors of their well-being. Masters aren't necessary, these people whose idleness is maintained by our labour; everyone must make himself useful to society, by which I mean work according to his ability and his aptitude. In this way, one would be a baker, another a teacher, etc. Following this principle, work would diminish, and each of us would have only an hour or two of work a day. Man, not being able to remain without some form of occupation, would find his distraction in work; there would be no lazy idlers, and if they did exist, there'd be so few of them that we could leave them in peace and, without complaint, let them profit from the work of others. There being no more laws, marriage would be destroyed. We would unite by inclination, and the family would be founded on the love of a father and mother for their children. For example, if a woman no longer loved he who she had chosen as a companion, she could separate from him and form a new association. In a word, complete freedom to live with those we love. If in the case I just cited there were children, society would raise them, that is to say, those who will love the children will take them in charge. With this free union, there will be no more prostitution. Secret illnesses would no longer exist, since these are only born of the abuse of the coming together of the sexes; an abuse to which women are forced to submit, since society's current conditions oblige them to take this up as a job in order to survive. Isn't money necessary in order to live, earned at whatever cost? With my principles, which I can't in so little time lay out in full detail, the army will no longer have any reason to exist, since there will no longer be distinct nations; private property would be destroyed, and all nations would have joined into one, which would be the Universe. No more war, no more disputes, no more jealousy, no more theft, no more murder, no more court system, no more police, no more administration.

The anarchists have not yet gone into the details of their constitution: the mileposts alone have been laid out. Today the anarchists are numerous enough to overthrow the current state of things, and if that hasn't yet happened, it's because we must complete the education of the followers, give birth in them to the energy and the firm will to assist in the realization of their projects. All that is needed for that is a shove, that someone put themselves at their head, and the revolution will take place. He who blows up houses has as a goal the extermination of all those who, by their social standing or their acts, are harmful to anarchy. If it was permitted to openly attack these people without fearing for the police, and so for one's skin, we wouldn't set out to destroy their homes through explosive devices, which could kill the suffering classes they have at their service at the same time as them."

Here is my analysis of this speech with a mind to its anarchist content:

- a) Ravachol regards himself as an anarchist propagandist and so he imagines his actions speak to (and for) his philosophy;
- b) He regards "the working class" as a coerced class, systemically forced to earn money from bosses and owners to survive;
- c) Anarchy is regarded by him as the obliteration of the idea of property (interpreted as legal or private property) together with the necessarily associated idea of ending the use of money. Putting these together, we may say that Ravachol advocates for the future impossibility of private material accumulation that results in socially usable and manipulative power, regarding both property and money as destructive fictions;
- d) This belief is motivated by Ravachol's observation of insidious inequality in which a few idle people profit vastly from the coerced and exploited labour of many others. Ravachol thinks that the large surplus the rich scrape off the top should be shared by all;

- e) Thus, he advocates for exchange without having to give something in return which suggests a social, rather than private, understanding of needs and resources;
- f) Ravachol extrapolates that, without property or money, this negates any need for laws or masters (no one will need to steal and there will be nothing to be in charge of) and this leads to the prospect of self-directed lives;
- g) In the area of love and sexuality, Ravachol advocates for completely free associations and an abolition of marriage. Sexual relations and associations shall, henceforth, be by inclination only;
- h) Society shall look after its children by being so organised that those who love and care for them shall take responsibility for them; this is no longer tied to the birth relation;
- i) Ravachol imagines that a new freedom and honesty in matters of love and sex shall negate the need for prostitution (which is sex used as a what would then become unnecessary means of financial support) and a reduction in sexual diseases (which were transmitted through dishonesty in order to acquire sex);
- j) Ravachol envisions the dissolution of multiple institutions of the State consequent on actually no longer needing (or wanting) states themselves; the human future will consist of freely associating people living self-directed lives according to their own inclinations;
- k) Ravachol concedes that all this requires a population educated to these ideas and values (which obviously neither capitalist societies nor authoritarian governments would wish to provide since it works against their interests) and so concedes that this currently isn't the case in raising the point. His own activities, however, are of course imagined as part of this education process;
- l) Ravachol argues that anarchists blow up rich men's property because they must use subterfuge to destroy those who would frustrate the general freedoms anarchy offers.

Defence Speech (Ravachol)

"If I speak, it's not to defend myself for the acts of which I am accused, for it is society alone which is responsible, since by its organization it sets man in a continual struggle of one against the other. In fact, don't we today see, in all classes and all positions, people who desire, I won't say the death, because that doesn't sound good, but the ill-fortune of their like, if they can gain advantages from this? For example, doesn't a boss hope to see a competitor die? And don't all businessmen reciprocally hope to be the only ones to enjoy the advantages that their occupations bring? In order to obtain employment, doesn't the unemployed worker hope that for some reason or another someone who does have a job will be thrown out of his workplace. Well then, in a society where such events occur, there's no reason to be surprised about the kind of acts for which I'm blamed, which are nothing but the logical consequence of the struggle for existence that men carry on who are obliged to use every means available in order to live. And since it's every man for himself, isn't he who is in need reduced to thinking: 'Well, since that's the way things are, when I'm hungry I have no reason to hesitate about using the means at my disposal, even at the risk of causing victims! Bosses, when they fire workers, do they worry whether or not they're going to die of hunger? Do those who have a surplus worry if there are those who lack the basic necessities?'

There are some who give assistance, but they are powerless to relieve all those in need and who will either die prematurely because of privations of various kinds, or voluntarily by suicides of all kinds, in order to put an end to a miserable existence and to not have to put up with the rigours of hunger, with countless shames and humiliations, and who are without hope of ever seeing them end. Thus, there are the Hayem and Souhain families,

who killed their children so as not to see them suffer any longer, and all the women who, in fear of not being able to feed a child, don't hesitate to destroy in their wombs the fruit of their love.

And all these things happen in the midst of an abundance of all sorts of products. We could understand if these things happened in a country where products are rare, where there is famine. But in France, where abundance reigns, where butcher shops are loaded with meat, bakeries with bread, where clothing and shoes are piled up in stores, where there are unoccupied lodgings! How can anyone accept that everything is for the best in a society when the contrary can be seen so clearly? There are many people who will feel sorry for the victims, but who'll tell you they can't do anything about it. Let everyone scrape by as he can! What can he who lacks the necessities when he's working do when he loses his job? He has only to let himself die of hunger. Then they'll throw a few pious words on his corpse. This is what I wanted to leave to others. I preferred to make of myself a trafficker in contraband, a counterfeiter, a murderer and assassin. I could have begged, but it's degrading and cowardly and even punished by your laws, which make poverty a crime. If all those in need, instead of waiting, took, wherever and by whatever means, the self-satisfied would understand perhaps a bit more quickly that it's dangerous to want to consecrate the existing social state, where worry is permanent and life threatened at every moment.

We will quickly understand that the anarchists are right when they say that, in order to have moral and physical peace, the causes that give birth to crime and criminals must be destroyed. We won't achieve these goals in suppressing he who, rather than die a slow death caused by the privations he had and will have to put up with, without any hope of ever seeing them end, prefers, if he has the least bit of energy, to violently take that which

can assure his well-being, even at the risk of death, which would only put an end to his sufferings.

So that is why I committed the acts of which I am accused, and which are nothing but the logical consequence of the barbaric state of a society which does nothing but increase the rigour of the laws that go after the effects without ever touching the causes. It is said that you must be cruel to kill your like, but those who say this don't see that you resolve to do this only to avoid the same fate.

In the same way you, messieurs members of the jury, will doubtless sentence me to death, because you think it is necessary, and that my death will be a source of satisfaction for you who hate to see human blood flow; but when you think it is useful to have it flow in order to ensure the security of your existence, you hesitate no more than I do, but with this difference: you do it without running any risk, while I, on the other hand, acted at the risk of my very life. Well, messieurs, there are no more criminals to judge, but the causes of crime to destroy! In creating the articles of the Criminal Code, the legislators forgot that they didn't attack the causes, but only the effects, and so they don't in any way destroy crime. In truth, the causes continuing to exist, the effects will necessarily flow from them. There will always be criminals, for today you destroy one, but tomorrow ten will be born.

What, then, is needed? Destroy poverty, this seed of crime, in assuring to all the satisfaction of their needs! How difficult this is to realize! All that is needed is to establish society on a new basis where all will be held in common and where each, producing according to his abilities and his strength, could consume according to his needs. Then and only then will we no longer see people like the hermit of Notre-Dame-de-Grace, and others, begging for a

metal whose victims and slaves they become! We will no longer see women give up their charms, like a common piece of merchandise, in exchange for this same metal that often prevents us from recognizing whether or not affection is sincere. We will no longer see men like Pranzini, Prado, Berland, Anastay and others who kill in order to have this same metal. This shows that the cause of all crimes is always the same - and you have to be foolish not to see this. Yes, I repeat it: it is society that makes criminals and you, jury members, instead of striking, you should use your intelligence and your strength to transform society. In one fell swoop you'll suppress all crime. And your work, in attacking causes, will be greater and more fruitful than your justice, which belittles itself in punishing its effects.

I am nothing but an uneducated worker; but because I have lived the life of the poor, I feel more than a rich bourgeois the iniquity of your repressive laws. What gives you the right to kill or lock up a man who, put on earth with the need to live, found himself obliged to take that which he lacks in order to feed himself?

I worked to live and to provide for my family; as long as neither I nor my family suffered too much, I remained what you call honest. Then work became scarce, and with unemployment came hunger. It is only then that the great law of nature, that imperious voice that accepts no reply, the instinct of preservation, forced me to commit some of the crimes and misdemeanours of which I am accused and which I admit I am the author of. Judge me, messieurs of the jury, but if you have understood me, while judging me judge all the unfortunate who poverty, combined with natural pride, made criminals, and who wealth or ease would have made honest men. An intelligent society would have made of them men like any other!"

Here is my interpretation of this defence speech which focuses more on creating political and economic context than it does on principles as the former speech did:

a) Ravachol regards capitalist society, in which private or legal property is revered in a situation of forced competition, as a dog eat dog scenario which encourages the doing down of one that another may rise. But, that being the case, he is surprised that people may be upset if some use their resources and abilities in that situation in order to exactly do down others that they may thereafter rise. Isn't this the "survival of the fittest" such people imagine the world to be? If you make people struggle for survival should you be surprised if some struggle harder, and better, and with more ingenuity and determination, than others or than you yourself?

b) Allied to this first point, Ravachol ponders on how much one should imagine the rich care about the fate of the poor. Probably not very much. But then why should the poor care about the rich, each other, or even just someone else? Why is the rich's lack of concern inappropriate to others when they manifest it themselves?

c) Ravachol observes that people commit suicide or even kill their children out of poverty and their inability to provide the necessary means of life's maintenance, a consequence of the socially-enforced political and economic system;

d) Ravachol observes there is great poverty in the midst of vast abundance in the France of his day, an obvious and unjustifiable inequality, and that, rather than eradicating it by different and better social and economic organisational principles, the politics of the day seek to punish the poverty instead;

e) Ravachol muses that if everyone just took what they needed, regardless of laws, economic relationships, property or wealth, that would lead to a revolution that even the rich would understand;

- f) Ravachol's analysis of political and economic relations concludes that society is incorrectly organised as something that can work for all. As a consequence of its unnecessarily competitive orientation, it creates the very crime and criminals it then protests (for it cannot be expected that people will just die quietly or accept, without protest, the inevitability of death that same political and economic system, deliberately so created, seems to force upon them);
- g) Ravachol further adds that authoritarians are those who treat the effects of their authoritarianism but never the causes;
- h) Ravachol asks how courts can condemn to death when he himself is not allowed to kill even in order to survive;
- i) Ravachol recognises that, when it comes to killing, he has to do his own killing himself. This at least has the virtue of him having to take personal responsibility, and personal risk, in the doing of it;
- j) Ravachol notes that law doesn't, and can never, eradicate crime. (In fact, it only creates more and more laws, more and more crimes, and more and more criminals. Its wrong-headed thinking, a "solution" that solves nothing and creates further problems);
- k) Ravachol suggests, instead of all the authoritarianism, coercion and law, that society destroy the existence of poverty completely and organise itself such that human needs become satisfied. Thus, you eradicate the reason to commit crime in the first place;
- l) Ravachol believes things should be held in common so that each may provide to a common stock from which they all equally take as needed;
- m) Ravachol believes that the requirement of needing personal material wealth in order to survive should be destroyed and that society should be reorganised in order to achieve it.

Auguste Vaillant

Auguste Vaillant was a man who, in many ways, had a similar background to Ravachol. He too was poor, moved from place to place to seek work (including, in one period of his life, even travelling to Argentina) and spent time in prison for stealing food. During his life in and around Paris he, like Ravachol, fell in with anarchists. He was made famous, however, for throwing a bomb in the French Chamber of Deputies on December 9th, 1893. The bomb was very underpowered and caused minor injuries to several Deputies - but no serious injuries or deaths - and may be regarded as more a symbolic gesture than a serious attempt to kill. He was motivated both by his own plight, and that of his many comrades, but also by the unjust execution, as he saw it, of Ravachol, a man who inspired him. His action had large political effects in France for, as a result, the French government announced a series of laws known colloquially as “lois scélérates” [“villainous laws”] which, respectively, condemned advocacy of any crime as being itself a crime, which permitted the French state to repress most of the anarchist press, condemned any person directly or indirectly involved in a “propaganda of the deed” act, even if no killing was carried out, and condemned any person or newspaper using anarchist propaganda (essentially a sanction on freedom of the press and an attempt to ban any public anarchist sentiment). Vaillant himself was arrested almost immediately after his own action (which actually slightly injured him too and required hospital treatment) and he was condemned to death by guillotine, as Ravachol had been, even though Vaillant had killed no one. Consequently, he was put to death on 5th February, 1894. Once more I have two documents to offer in consideration of Vaillant’s views and I shall take them in turn below:

Hospital Interrogation (Vaillant) (The tone is due to this being a newspaper report)

"It was exactly 9:00 a.m. when messieurs Lepine, police prefect, Roulier, procureur of the Republic, Clément, judicial commissioner; Meyer, investigating magistrate; and Fedée, police officer, went to the Hôtel-Dieu Hospital for the interrogation of Vaillant, alias Marchal. The wounded man was lying on his bed, his cut face bearing a cloth band compressing the light wound on his nose. He didn't appear in the least perturbed by the magistrates' entrance into the small room where he was being held. He raised himself slightly on his elbow and stretched his neck in a movement of expectation and cheeky curiosity. The investigating magistrate Meyer having asked him if his condition allowed him to bear a long interrogation, Vaillant dryly responded: 'Perfectly.' His face then lit up with a strange, mocking, almost demonic smile.

'Until now,' M. Meyer said to him, 'you've had a strange attitude that seems to confirm the suspicions against you. The information gathered about you presents you as a man particularly devoted to anarchism.' 'Indeed I am an anarchist and I am proud of it.' 'What did you go to do at the Chamber yesterday?' 'I went there to do what pleased me. There were many others besides me.' 'Why these two names, Marchal and Vaillant, which you gave in different places?' 'Because it pleased me to act that way. I have no explanations to give you.' 'But you had a goal in seeking to hide your identity.' 'A goal? Not at all. My name is Vaillant in Choisy-le-Roi and Marchal in Paris. There are tons of people who have pseudonyms. What does that prove?' 'It proved you are a suspect.'

Vaillant interrupted the judge with a loud laugh. 'So I'm a suspect,' he shouted with his loud, metallic voice. 'Suspected of what? Of having thrown the bomb in the Chamber of

Deputies? That's why you've come here to interrogate me, why you're nosing around trying to get answers out of me. There's no need to work so hard at this.' And Vaillant added, shaking his head with an air of satisfaction and defiance: 'Well, I'm the one who did it. It's unfortunate that it's some sad buggers who are taking the rap. I'd have loved to make a fricassee of those deputy bastards.' 'What had the deputies ever done to you?' 'What did they do to me? To me personally, nothing. But they're people it wouldn't be such a bad thing to be rid of.' 'And you committed this odious act without thinking that you have a wife and children?' 'Oh my wife and children won't be any worse off when they don't have me than when they do.'

Vaillant then complacently provided the information that was asked of him about his past. He was born in Mezières December 29, 1861 and he worked at various professions. His last position was at the leather craft store of M. Petitpoint in Choisy-le-Roi. The idea to throw the bomb at the chamber came to Vaillant after the rejection of the proposed amnesty bill. Well before this the anarchist had developed a plan to commit an attack in Paris 'to frighten the bourgeois,' but this plan was still quite vague and he didn't know who he'd attack. Auguste Vaillant left his home in Choisy-le-Roi on November 26, leaving in distress the mistress Marchal and a little girl named Sidonie, who he'd had with his legitimate spouse, currently in America. He went to Paris and moved in to 70 rue Daguerre in a hotel owned by Mme Picard. He arrived at this establishment, one of a low order, on November 27, his baggage consisting of only a valise in bad condition and a blackened wooden box with crude hinges and a primitive lock. For the sum of twenty-four francs per month, he rented room two, on the second floor on the street side.

The existence Vaillant led in this tiny room was extremely mysterious: he never received any guests but he often went out at night, often not returning. Nevertheless, he enjoyed a certain amount of consideration in the hotel, where he was registered under the name Marchal. As proof of identity he had provided the owner a marriage license in this name, which we know to be that of his mistress. The latter must have been or must be married. He inspired confidence by paying a month in advance. But he never went out without taking his valise and only wanted his room done in his presence. On the eve of the attack, that is Friday, Vaillant returned home at noon, laid down and then went out again at about 6:00. He asked Mme Picard for the address of a locksmith to repair his cloth bag, one of whose hinges he said was broken. The hotel keeper gave him the address of a locksmith on the rue Gassendi, who wasn't in when the anarchist went there. After that no one saw Vaillant; he refused to say where he spent the night of Friday into Saturday in order 'not to compromise a comrade.' The accused gave all this information with good grace, all the while smiling, mockingly affirming its scrupulous accuracy.

Nor did he hesitate to give a complete description of the murderous device that he made with his own hands. The examination of the metal debris found in the Chamber had led people to believe that the explosive was contained in a soldier's can or in a mess tin. It is Vaillant himself who said he used a worker's canteen, that is, a tin recipient fifteen centimetres high and oval in form. This utensil usually has a cap and a handle used for carrying it. In order for the bomb to take up as little room as possible in his pocket Vaillant removed the handle, one of the fasteners, as well as the cap. He obtained this object and one like it at the Bazaar of the Hotel de Ville. The explosive used in the improvised bomb was made of chlorate powder and the projectiles, as we already know, were simple cobbler's nails. In the middle Vaillant had placed a glass ampoule filled with sulphuric acid

whose extremity was formed by a cotton tampon. The device was of the type known as a reversal device. Once the canteen was turned upside down the acid ate away at the tampon and the contact of the acid with the powder charge caused the latter to be set alight. It is believed that Vaillant used 750 grams of nails. The anarchist admits that he himself manipulated the substances that made up the chlorate powder but he refuses to say how he obtained these products. Nor did he want to divulge the address of the nail merchant.

'How did you enter the Chamber,' they then asked the anarchist. 'Easily. With a card given me by M. Argeliès, deputy from the Seine et Oise.'

'And how did you throw your bomb?' 'I was seated in the second row of the spectators, against the barrier of the tribune reserved for members of the public with tickets. I had my bomb in the right hand pocket of my overcoat and I held myself perfectly still in order to avoid a shock that would have produced a premature explosion. I waited an hour for the favourable moment to throw my box and took advantage of the moment when the deputies' attention was concentrated on the tribune, where M. Mirman had just spoken. My intention was to throw my device so that it fell in the hemicycle at the foot of the tribune. But a lady sitting next to me prevented me from fully extending my arm and I wasn't able to throw the bomb as vigorously as I would have liked. The bomb exploded in the air and I was one of the first victims of the explosion.'

'What did you do afterwards?' 'I sought to flee. I went downstairs, wiping the blood dripping from my nose with a handkerchief and I found the doors closed, which didn't surprise me at all, since I'd heard the order given by M. Bizarelli. 'And afterwards?' 'Afterwards I went back up, crossing the rotunda. I walked through the corridors of the tribunes and then went to the urinals. Someone said to me, 'You're wounded, go get yourself taken care of at the infirmary.' After my head was wrapped in a bandage the police grabbed me and took me to a superintendent. You know the rest.'

He was asked if he regretted his act and Vaillant responded: 'I regret nothing at all, and if I was free I'd do it all over again. The people have

been suffering for long enough. All methods are good to hasten their deliverance.’ And Vaillant added with a tone of profound conviction: ‘I’m proud of the act I committed. If you think I had accomplices you’re wrong. I did all this on my own, and if my spontaneous confession gives me the right to a favour I ask you to bother no one because of me.’”

The lessons here are short but sweet and I shall relate them as follows:

- a) Vaillant says more than once that he “does what pleases him” – which recalls the title of the anarchy imagined in the book *V for Vendetta* by Alan Moore and David Lloyd where anarchy is referred to as “The Land of Do-As-You-Please”;
- b) Vaillant has no interest in denying his crime and admits it openly, taking the full responsibility for it onto himself;
- c) Vaillant refers to the people suffering as a pre-eminent concern he is keen to see addressed. (It might also be inferred here that he sees the Deputies as responsible for this);
- d) Vaillant expresses the view that “all methods” are valid methods where the relief of the suffering mass is concerned.

Courtroom Statement (Vaillant)

“Gentlemen, in a few minutes you are to deal your blow, but in receiving your verdict I shall have at least the satisfaction of having wounded the existing society, that cursed society in which one may see a single man spending, uselessly, enough to feed thousands of families; an infamous society which permits a few individuals to monopolize all the social wealth, while there are hundreds of thousands of unfortunates who have not even the bread that is

not refused to dogs, and while entire families are committing suicide for want of the necessities of life. Ah, gentlemen, if the governing classes could go down among the unfortunates! But no, they prefer to remain deaf to their appeals. It seems that a fatality impels them, like the royalty of the eighteenth century, toward the precipice which will engulf them, for woe be to those who remain deaf to the cries of the starving, woe to those who, believing themselves of superior essence, assume the right to exploit those beneath them! There comes a time when the people no longer reason; they rise like a hurricane, and pass away like a torrent. Then we see bleeding heads impaled on pikes.

Among the exploited, gentlemen, there are two classes of individuals. Those of one class, not realizing what they are and what they might be, take life as it comes, believe that they are born to be slaves, and content themselves with the little that is given them in exchange for their labour. But there are others, on the contrary, who think, who study, and who, looking about them, discover social iniquities. Is it their fault if they see clearly and suffer at seeing others suffer? Then they throw themselves into the struggle, and make themselves the bearers of the popular claims. Gentlemen, I am one of these last. Wherever I have gone, I have seen unfortunates bent beneath the yoke of capital. Everywhere I have seen the same wounds causing tears of blood to flow, even in the remoter parts of the inhabited districts of South America, where I had the right to believe that he who was weary of the pains of civilization might rest in the shade of the palm trees and there study nature. Well, there even, more than elsewhere, I have seen capital come, like a vampire, to suck the last drop of blood of the unfortunate pariahs.

Then I came back to France, where it was reserved for me to see my family suffer atrociously. This was the last drop in the cup of my sorrow. Tired of leading this life of

suffering and cowardice, I carried this bomb to those who are primarily responsible for social misery. I am reproached with the wounds of those who were hit by my projectiles. Permit me to point out in passing that, if the bourgeois had not massacred or caused massacres during the Revolution, it is probable that they would still be under the yoke of the nobility. On the other hand, figure up the dead and wounded on Tonquin, Madagascar, Dahomey, adding thereto the thousands, yes, millions of unfortunates who die in the factories, the mines, and wherever the grinding power of capital is felt. Add also those who die of hunger, and all this with the assent of our Deputies. Beside all this, of how little weight are the reproaches now brought against me! It is true that one does not efface the other; but, after all, are we not acting on the defensive when we respond to the blows which we receive from above? I know very well that I shall be told that I ought to have confined myself to speech for the vindication of the people's claims. But what can you expect! It takes a loud voice to make the deaf hear.

Too long have they answered our voices by imprisonment, the rope, rifle volleys. Make no mistake; the explosion of my bomb is not only the cry of the rebel Vaillant, but the cry of an entire class which vindicates its rights, and which will soon add acts to words. For, be sure of it, in vain will they pass laws. The ideas of the thinkers will not halt; just as, in the last century, all the governmental forces could not prevent the Diderots and the Voltaires from spreading emancipating ideas among the people, so all the existing governmental forces will not prevent the Reclus, the Darwins, the Spencers, the Ibsens, the Mirbeaus, from spreading the ideas of justice and liberty which will annihilate the prejudices that hold the mass in ignorance. And these ideas, welcomed by the unfortunate, will flower in acts of revolt as they have done in me, until the day when the disappearance of authority shall permit all men to organize freely according to their choice, when everyone shall be able to

enjoy the product of his labour, and when those moral maladies called prejudices shall vanish, permitting human beings to live in harmony, having no other desire than to study the sciences and love their fellows.

I conclude, gentlemen, by saying that a society in which one sees such social inequalities as we see all about us, in which we see every day suicides caused by poverty, prostitution flaring at every street corner, — a society whose principal monuments are barracks and prisons, — such a society must be transformed as soon as possible, on pain of being eliminated, and that speedily, from the human race. Hail to him who labours, by no matter what means, for this transformation! It is this idea that has guided me in my duel with authority, but as in this duel I have only wounded my adversary, it is now its turn to strike me. Now, gentlemen, to me it matters little what penalty you may inflict, for, looking at this assembly with the eyes of reason, I cannot help smiling to see you, atoms lost in matter, and reasoning only because you possess a prolongation of the spinal marrow, assume the right to judge one of your fellows. Ah! gentlemen, how little a thing is your assembly and your verdict in the history of humanity; and human history, in its turn, is likewise a very little thing in the whirlwind which bears it through immensity, and which is destined to disappear, or at least to be transformed, in order to begin again the same history and the same facts, a veritably perpetual play of cosmic forces renewing and transferring themselves forever."

My interpretation of this statement runs as follows:

a) Vaillant once again speaks of overwhelming inequality just as Ravachol had done. There are those who gather vast abundance whilst thousands starve, which such

abundance could support, even as there are those who live in misery within sight of palaces filled to bursting with provisions;

b) Vaillant states that the governing classes have closed their ears to the suffering poor and that quiet protestations have no effect on them;

c) Vaillant refers to a yoke of capital which is vampiric in its pursuit of further riches for itself;

d) Vaillant states clearly that those who govern are the ones responsible for the economic situation and the political circumstances which make change almost impossible to achieve;

e) Vaillant suggests that it takes violence to get out from under crushing systemic oppression and gives the example of the 1789 Revolution;

f) Vaillant contrasts his own crime, which killed no one, with the systematic harm and death (much more apparent and immediate in Victorian times) produced by capitalist activity which is forced upon the general populace. (I would add here that there are, and have been, endless capitalist projects which overlook the harm and death they cause, or might cause, because the economic profit for a boss or owner is valued as more important.) This being the case, it is a huge hypocrisy to complain about violence;

g) Vaillant argues that to act against vast exploitative and coercive power is but an act of self-defence;

h) Vaillant suggests that liberatory ideas cannot be shot, hung or imprisoned to any final winning effect. (Compare Alan Moore: "Ideas are bulletproof");

i) Vaillant looks forward to the disappearance of authority and the free organisation of human beings at their own discretion as well as to the end of the theft of labour by bosses and owners in a world where one's labour should be one's own;

j) Vaillant intimates that an authoritarian society is a death cult that has a death wish.

Émile Henry

Émile Henry was the son of a Communard and was only 21 years old when he committed his propaganda of the deed on 12th February, 1894, a week after Vaillant's death and in response to it. His first years were spent in exile in Spain until the 1880 French amnesty freed all Communards to return to France. On his return, his brother, who was already an anarchist, introduced him to anarchists as well. Yet Henry did not himself become an anarchist until the early 1890s, then in his late teens. He was an intelligent youth and had passed the written entrance exam for the prestigious École Polytechnique and he was not the sort of person who simply went along with others, being independent of mind. At first, for example, he had opposed the violent bombings of Ravachol that had potential to harm "innocent" people as well as their stated targets. Brutal police repression of anarchists as a result of such actions, however, changed his mind. What particularly outraged him and became the final straw was the way Vaillant had been treated.

Henry was not like Ravachol and Vaillant in one respect, however. Rather than blaming specific official figures – judges, Deputies – for societal problems, Henry, as you will read below, blamed everyone who went along with them, in class terms, the bourgeoisie. He consequently came to the conclusion that there are NO innocent bourgeoisie and that, therefore, he did not see why the oppressions and exploitations they supported by their indifference to them and their participation in helping to carry them out should go without consequences. I offer two documents for consideration from Henry, his defence speech and a letter he wrote to an official who had visited him in prison as follows:

Defence Speech (Henry)

"It is not a defence that I present to you. I am not in any way seeking to escape the reprisals of the society I have attacked. Besides, I acknowledge only one tribunal — myself, and the verdict of any other is meaningless to me. I wish merely to give you an explanation of my acts and to tell you how I was led to perform them.

I have been an anarchist for only a short time. It was as recently as the middle of the year 1891 that I entered the revolutionary movement. Up to that time, I had lived in circles entirely imbued with current morality. I had been accustomed to respect and even to love the principles of fatherland and family, of authority and property.

For teachers in the present generation too often forget one thing; it is that life, with its struggles and defeats, its injustices and iniquities, takes upon itself indiscreetly to open the eyes of the ignorant to reality. This happened to me, as it happens to everyone. I had been told that life was easy, that it was wide open to those who were intelligent and energetic; experience showed me that only the cynical and the servile were able to secure good seats at the banquet. I had been told that our social institutions were founded on justice and equality; I observed all around me nothing but lies and impostures.

Each day I shed an illusion. Everywhere I went, I witnessed the same miseries among some, and the same joys among others. I was not slow to understand that the grand words I had been taught to venerate: honour, devotion, duty, were only the mask that concealed the most shameful basenesses. The manufacturer who created a colossal fortune out of the toil of workers who lacked everything was an honest gentleman. The deputy and the minister,

their hands ever open for bribes, were devoted to the public good. The officer who experimented with a new type of rifle on children of seven had done his duty, and, openly in parliament, the president of the council congratulated him! Everything I saw revolted me, and my intelligence was attracted by criticism of the existing social organization. Such criticism has been made too often for me to repeat it. It is enough to say that I became the enemy of a society that I judged to be criminal.

Drawn at first to socialism, I was not slow in separating myself from that party. I have too much love of freedom, too much respect for individual initiative, too much repugnance for military organization, to assume a number in the ordered army of the fourth estate. Besides, I realized that basically socialism changes nothing in the existing order. It maintains the principle of authority, and, whatever self-styled free-thinkers may say about it, that principle is no more than the antiquated survival of faith in a superior power. Scientific studies gradually made me aware of the play of natural forces in the universe. I became materialist and atheist; I came to realize that modern science discards the hypothesis of God, of which it has no need. In the same way, religious and authoritarian morality, which are based on false assumptions, should be allowed to disappear. What then, I asked myself, was the new morality in harmony with the laws of nature that might regenerate the old world and give birth to a happy humanity?

It was at this moment that I came into contact with a group of anarchist comrades whom I consider, even today, among the best I have ever known. The character of these men immediately captivated me. I discerned in them a great sincerity, a total frankness, a searching distrust of all prejudices, and I wanted to understand the idea that produced men so different from anyone I had encountered up to that point. The idea — as soon as I

embraced it — found in my mind a soil completely prepared by observation and personal reflection to receive it. It merely gave precision to what already existed there in vague and wavering form. In my turn I became an anarchist. I do not need to develop on this occasion the whole theory of anarchism. I merely wish to emphasize its revolutionary aspect, the destructive and negative aspect that brings me here before you.

*At this moment of embittered struggle between the middle class and its enemies, I am almost tempted to say, with Souvarine in *Germinal*: 'All discussions about the future are criminal, since they hinder pure and simple destruction and slow down the march of the revolution...' I brought with me into the struggle a profound hatred which every day was renewed by the spectacle of this society where everything is base, everything is equivocal, everything is ugly, where everything is an impediment to the outflow of human passions, to the generous impulses of the heart, to the free flight of thought.*

I wanted to strike as strongly and as justly as I could. Let us start then with the first attempt I made, the explosion in the Rue des Bon-Enfants. I had followed closely the events at Carmaux. The first news of the strike had filled me with joy. The miners seemed at last to have abandoned those useless pacific strikes in which the trusting worker patiently waits for his few francs to triumph over the company's millions. They seemed to have entered on a way of violence which manifested itself resolutely on the 15th August 1892. The offices and buildings of the mine were invaded by a crowd of people tired of suffering without reprisals; justice was about to be wrought on the engineer whom his workers so deeply hated, when the timorous ones chose to interfere. Who were these men? The same who cause the miscarriage of all revolutionary movements because they fear that the people, once they act freely, will no longer obey their voices; those who persuade thousands of men

to endure privations month after month so as to beat the drum over their sufferings and create for themselves a popularity that will put them into office: such men — I mean the socialist leaders — in fact assumed the leadership of the strike movement.

Immediately a wave of glib gentlemen appeared in the region; they put themselves entirely at the disposition of the struggle, organized subscriptions, arranged conferences and appealed on all sides for funds. The miners surrendered all initiative into their hands, and what happened, everyone knows. The strike went on and on, and the miners established the most intimate acquaintance with hunger, which became their habitual companion; they used up the tiny reserve fund of their syndicate and of the other organizations which came to their help, and then, at the end of two months, they returned crestfallen to their pit, more wretched than ever before. It would have been so simple in the beginning to have attacked the Company in its only sensitive spot, the financial one; to have burnt the stocks of coal, to have broken the mining machines, to have demolished the drainage pumps. Then, certainly, the Company would have very soon capitulated. But the great pontiffs of socialism would not allow such procedures because they are anarchist procedures. At such games one runs the risk of prison and — who knows? — perhaps one of those bullets that performed so miraculously at Fourmies? That is not the way to win seats on municipal councils or in legislatures. In brief, having been momentarily troubled, order reigned once again at the Carmaux. More powerful than ever, the Company continued its exploitation, and the gentlemen shareholders congratulated themselves on the happy outcome of the strike. Their dividends would be even more pleasant to gather in.

It was then that I decided to intrude among that concert of happy tones a voice the bourgeois had already heard but which they thought had died with Ravachol: the voice of

dynamite. I wanted to show the bourgeoisie that henceforward their pleasures would not be untouched, that their insolent triumphs would be disturbed, that their golden calf would rock violently on its pedestal until the final shock that would cast it down among filth and blood. At the same time I wanted to make the miners understand that there is only one category of men, the anarchists, who sincerely resent their sufferings and are willing to avenge them. Such men do not sit in parliament like Monsieur Guesde and his associates, but they march to the guillotine.

So I prepared a bomb. At one stage the accusation that had been thrown at Ravachol came to my memory. What about the innocent victims? I soon resolved that question. The building where the Carmaux Company had its offices was inhabited only by the bourgeois; hence there would be no innocent victims. The whole of the bourgeoisie lives by the exploitation of the unfortunate, and should expiate its crimes together. So it was with absolute confidence in the legitimacy of my deed that I left my bomb before the door to the Company's offices. I have already explained my hope, in case my device was discovered before it exploded, that it would go off in the police station, where those it harmed would still be my enemies. Such were the motives that led me to commit the first attempt of which I have been accused.

Let us go on to the second incident, of the Cafe Terminus. I had returned to Paris at the time of the Vaillant affair, and I witnessed the frightful repression that followed the explosion at the Palais-Bourbon. I saw the draconian measures which the government decided to take against the anarchists. Everywhere there were spies, and searches, and arrests. A crowd of individuals were indiscriminately rounded up, torn from their families, and thrown into prison. Nobody was concerned about what happened to the wives and children of these

comrades while they remained in jail. The anarchist was no longer regarded as a man, but as a wild beast to be hunted everywhere while the bourgeois Press, which is the vile slave of authority, loudly demands his extermination. At the same time, libertarian papers and pamphlets were seized and the right of meeting was abrogated. Worse than that: when it seemed desirable to get one comrade completely out of the way, an informer came and left in his room a packet which he said contained tannin; the next day a search was made, on a warrant dated the previous day, a box of suspicious powders was found, the comrade was taken to court and sentenced to three years in gaol. If you wish to know the truth of that, ask the wretched spy who found his way into the home of comrade Merigeaud!

But all such procedures were good because they struck at an enemy who had spread fear, and those who had trembled wanted to display their courage. As the crown of that crusade against the heretics, we heard M. Reynal, Minister of the Interior, declare in the Chamber of Deputies that the measures taken by the government had thrown terror into the camp of the anarchists. But that was not yet enough. A man who had killed nobody was condemned to death. It was necessary to appear brave right to the end, and one fine morning he was guillotined. But, gentlemen of the bourgeoisie, you have reckoned a little too much without your host. You arrested hundreds of men and women, you violated scores of homes, but still outside the prison walls there were men unknown to you who watched from the shadows as you hunted the anarchists, and waited only for the moment that would be favourable for them in their turn to hunt the hunters.

Reynal's words were a challenge thrown before the anarchists. The gauntlet was taken up. The bomb in the Cafe Terminus is the answer to all your violations of freedom, to your arrests, to your searches, to your laws against the Press, to your mass deportations, to your

guillotining. But why, you ask, attack those peaceful cafe guests, who sat listening to music and who, no doubt, were neither judges nor deputies nor bureaucrats? Why? It is very simple. The bourgeoisie did not distinguish among the anarchists. Vaillant, a man on his own, threw a bomb; nine-tenths of the comrades did not even know him. But that meant nothing; the persecution was a mass one, and anyone with the slightest anarchist links was hunted down. And since you hold a whole party responsible for the actions of a single man, and strike indiscriminately, we also strike indiscriminately. Perhaps we should attack only the deputies who make laws against us, the judges who apply those laws, the police who arrest us? I do not agree. These men are only instruments. They do not act in their own name. Their functions were instituted by the bourgeoisie for its own defence. They are no more guilty than the rest of you. Those good bourgeois who hold no office but who reap their dividends and live idly on the profits of the workers' toil, they also must take their share in the reprisals. And not only they, but all those who are satisfied with the existing order, who applaud the acts of government and so become its accomplices, those clerks earning three or five hundred francs a month who hate the people even more violently than the rich, that stupid and pretentious mass of folk who always choose the strongest side — in other words, the daily clientele of Terminus and the other great cafes!

That is why I struck at random and did not choose my victims! The bourgeoisie must be brought to understand that those who have suffered are tired at last of their sufferings; they are showing their teeth and they will strike all the more brutally if you are brutal with them. They have no respect for human life, because the bourgeoisie themselves have shown they have no care for it. It is not for the assassins who were responsible for the bloody week (where up to 20,000 Communards were killed) and for Fourmies (where guns were turned on peaceful marchers celebrating May Day) to regard others as assassins.

We will not spare the women and children of the bourgeois, for the women and children of those we love have not been spared. Must we not count among the innocent victims those children who die slowly of anaemia in the slums because bread is scarce in their houses; those women who grow pale in your workshops, working to earn forty sous a day and fortunate when poverty does not force them into prostitution; those old men whom you have made production machines all their lives and whom you cast on to the waste heap or into the workhouse when their strength has worn away? At least have the courage of your crimes, gentlemen of the bourgeoisie, and grant that our reprisals are completely legitimate.

Of course, I am under no illusions. I know my deeds will not yet be understood by the masses who are unprepared for them. Even among the workers, for whom I have fought, there will be many, misled by your newspapers, who will regard me as their enemy. But that does not matter. I am not concerned with anyone's judgement. Nor am I ignorant of the fact that there are individuals claiming to be anarchists who hasten to disclaim any solidarity with the propagandists of the deed. They seek to establish a subtle distinction between the theoreticians and the terrorists. Too cowardly to risk their own lives, they deny those who act. But the influence they pretend to wield over the revolutionary movement is nil. Today the field is open to action, without weakness or retreat.

Alexander Herzen, the Russian revolutionary, once said: 'Of two things one must be chosen: to condemn and march forward, or to pardon and turn back half way.' We intend neither to pardon nor to turn back, and we shall always march forward until the revolution, which is the goal of our efforts, finally arrives to crown our work with the creation of a free world.

In that pitiless war which we have declared on the bourgeoisie, we ask for no pity. We give death, and we know how to endure it. So it is with indifference that I await your verdict. I know that my head is not the last you will cut off; yet others will fall, for the starving are beginning to know the way to your great cafes and restaurants, to the Terminus and Foyot. You will add other names to the bloody list of our dead. You have hanged in Chicago, decapitated in Germany, garroted in Jerez, shot in Barcelona, guillotined in Montbrison and Paris, but what you will never destroy is anarchy. Its roots are too deep. It is born in the heart of a society that is rotting and falling apart. It is a violent reaction against the established order. It represents all the egalitarian and libertarian aspirations that strike out against authority. It is everywhere, which makes it impossible to contain. It will end by killing you.

My interpretation of Henry's defence speech runs as follows:

- a) Henry imagines that anarchy and bourgeois society operate according to entirely different ethical values which thus provide different ethical contexts;
- b) Henry typifies society as a place of fatherland, family, authority and property;
- c) Imagining society further as a place of cynicism, servility and dishonesty, Henry regards it as a criminal system;
- d) Henry observes that people often fear the consequences of anarchy because they fear losing control. He imagines that anyone who wants power within a system articulated by means of a hierarchy of power relations (and so desires a position of leadership) is an enemy of anarchy and essentially wants the present system to continue, if with different names and faces at the top of its hierarchy. Henry doesn't imagine this as any sort of real or effective change;

- e) Henry imagines anarchists as those who suffer, nurse vengeance and have a will to strike back;
- f) Henry had clearly developed an ethical theory of legitimate targets and worked through the question of responsibility, his own and that of others, in his head. He is one who takes responsibility for what he does and neither asks for, nor expects, any quarter;
- g) Henry seems to think of what he is engaged in as a war and can speak in the language of self-defence (something he thinks is legitimate);
- h) Henry strikes at oppressive systems and institutions. Obviously, however, these are all made operative and effective by human beings. Such human beings are pawns of these things and, inasmuch as they act in their name and in order to manifest their oppression, Henry believes they are also culpable for them;
- i) Henry believes that those who attack, shoot and kill others by the thousands, and in a systematic and habitual way, cannot complain if others strike back with their own violence but to a much lesser extent or effect;
- j) Henry is concerned with habitual and systemic social oppression;
- k) Henry thinks the media serve bourgeois interests;
- l) Henry speaks of an economically, politically and socially revolutionary goal;
- m) Henry is against both authority and the established order.

Letter to the Director of the Conciergerie (Henry)

"During the visit you made to my cell Sunday, the 18th of this month, we had a quite friendly discussion of anarchist ideas. You said you were very surprised to learn our theories in a different light, and you asked me to summarize our conversation in writing, in order to better know what the anarchists want. You can easily understand, Monsieur, that in just a

*few pages one can't expound upon a theory which analyses our current social life in all of its manifestations, that studies these manifestations the way a doctor examines a sick body, and which then condemns them because they're contrary to human happiness and, in place of them, builds an entirely new life, based on principles completely antagonistic to those upon which the old society was built. Besides, others have already done what you ask of me: Kropotkin, Reclus, Sébastien Faure, have set forth their ideas, and pushed their development as far as possible. Read *Évolution et Révolution* by Reclus, *La Morale Anarchiste*, *Les Paroles d'un Révolté*, *La Conquete du Pain* by Peter Kropotkin; *Autorité et Liberté*, *Le Machinisme et ses Conséquences* by Sébastien Faure; *La Société Mourante et l'Anarchie* by Grave; *Entre Paysans (Fra Contadini)* by Malatesta; read also the numerous pamphlets and manifestos that have appeared over the last fifteen years, each expounding new ideas, according to whether study or circumstances suggested them to their authors. Read all of this and then you would form a well-founded judgment on anarchy.*

Nevertheless, don't think that anarchism is a dogma, a doctrine that can't be attacked, indisputable, venerated by its followers as the Koran is by Muslims. No, the absolute freedom that we call for ceaselessly expands our ideas, raises them towards new horizons (following the will of diverse individuals) and removes them from the rigid frameworks of regimentation and codification. We are not 'believers;' we don't bow before Reclus or Kropotkin. We debate their ideas, we accept them when they develop sympathetic impressions in our brains, but we reject them when they don't strike a chord within us. We are far from possessing the blind faith of the collectivists, who believe in something because Guesde said it had to be believed in, and who have a catechism whose paragraphs it would be sacrilegious to dispute. This being established, I am going to try to briefly and

rapidly expound for you what I understand by anarchy, without involving other comrades who, on certain points, could have views different from mine.

You would not dispute the fact that the current social system is evil, and the proof that it is, is that everyone suffers from it. From the poor itinerant, with neither bread nor roof, who knows constant hunger, to the millionaire, who lives in fear of a revolt of the poor that would trouble his digestion, all of humanity lives in a state of anxiety. On what bases does bourgeois society rest? Putting aside the principles of family, fatherland, and religion, which are nothing but corollaries, we can affirm that the two cornerstones, the two fundamental principles of the current state, are authority and property. I don't want to go on any longer on this subject: it would be easy for me to prove that all the ills we suffer from flow from property and authority. Poverty, theft, crime, prostitution, war, revolution are all nothing but the results of these principles. The two bases of society being thus evil, there is no reason to hesitate. There's no need to try any of a group of palliatives (e.g. socialism) that serve only to shift the wrong. The two vicious germs must be destroyed, and eradicated from social life.

This is why we anarchists want to replace private property with communism, and authority with freedom. No more deeds of possession or domination: absolute equality. When we say absolute equality we don't claim that all men will have the same brain, the same physical organization: we know that there will always be the greatest diversity in cerebral and physical aptitudes. It is precisely this variety of capacities that will bring into being the production of all that is necessary for humanity, and we count on this as well to maintain emulation in an anarchist society. There will be engineers and labourers: this is obvious. But one will not be considered superior to the other, since the work of the engineer is useless

without the collaboration of the labourer, and vice versa. Everyone being free to choose his trade, there will exist only beings that obey, without any constraints, the leanings nature places in them (guarantee of good productivity). Here a question must be asked: And the lazy? Will everyone want to work? We answer yes, everyone will want to work, and here is why: Today, the average workday is ten hours. Many workers are kept busy at labours that are absolutely useless to society, in particular on armaments for the army and navy. Many are also unemployed. Add to this a considerable number of able-bodied men who produce nothing: soldiers, priests, policemen, magistrates, civil servants, etc. We can thus say, without being accused of exaggeration, that of a hundred capable of producing some kind of labour, only fifty furnish an effort truly useful to society. It is these fifty who produce all of society's riches. From this flows the deduction that if everyone worked, instead of ten hours the workday would decrease to only five.

Beyond this we should consider that in the current state of things the total of manufactured products is four times, and of agricultural products three times, the amount required to meet humanity's needs; which is to say that a humanity three times more numerous would be clothed, housed, heated, fed; in a word, would have all of its needs satisfied if waste and other causes didn't destroy that overproduction. (You will find these statistics in the little pamphlet: 'The Products of the Land and of Industry'). From what has gone before, we can draw the following conclusion: A society where all would work together, and which would be satisfied with productivity not far beyond its consumer needs (the excess of the first over the second would constitute a small reserve), would have to ask of each of its able-bodied members an effort of only two or three hours, perhaps less. Who would then refuse to give such a small quantity of labour? Who would want to live with the shame of being held in contempt by all and being considered a parasite?

Now, property and authority march together, the one supporting the other to keep humanity enslaved. What is the right to property? Is it a natural right? Is it legitimate that one eats while the other fasts? No. Nature, in creating us, made us with similar organisms, and the labourer's stomach demands the same satisfaction as that of the financier. Nevertheless, one class today has taken all, stealing from the other class the bread not only of its body, but also of its soul. Yes, in a century that we call one of progress and of science, is it not painful to think of the millions of intelligences hungry for knowledge and that cannot flourish? How many children of the common man, who could have become men and women of great value, useful to humanity, will never know anything but the few indispensable notions taught in elementary school. Property! That is the enemy of human happiness, for it alone creates inequality, and in its train hatred, envy, bloody revolt... Established authority serves no other purpose than the sanctioning of property. It is there to put force at the service of the act of despoiling.

Work being a natural need you will accept along with me that no one would flee from the demand of as minimal an effort as that which we spoke of above. (Labour is so natural a need that History shows us several statesmen treating themselves with joy from the cares of politics to work as simple labourers: To cite two well-known cases: Louis XVI worked with locks, and in our day Gladstone, 'The Great Old Man', profits from his vacations to himself chop down some of the oaks of his forests like a common lumberjack.) So you see, Monsieur, there would be no reason to have recourse to the law to avoid the problem of idlers. But if in some extraordinary case someone wanted to refuse his assistance to his brothers, it would still be less costly to feed this unfortunate, who can only be described as sick, than to maintain legislators, magistrates, police and prison wardens to break him down.

Many other questions arise, but they are of a secondary nature, the most important thing being to establish that the suppression of property would not cause a cessation of production due to the development of laziness, and that anarchist society would know how to feed itself and satisfy all of its needs. All the other objections that can be raised will be easily refuted by taking inspiration from the idea that an anarchist milieu would cause to grow in each of its members the love of, and solidarity with, his like, for man will know that in working for others he works for himself.

A seemingly better-founded objection is the following: If there is no more authority, if there is no fear of the gendarme to stop the criminal's arm, don't we risk seeing crimes and misdemeanours multiply at a frightening rate? The answer is easy: We can categorize the crimes committed today in two principal categories; crimes of interest and crimes of passion. The first group will disappear on its own, since there can be no attacks on property in a milieu which has done away with property. As for the second group, no law can stop them. Far from this being the case, the current law — which acquits a husband who kills his adulterous wife — does nothing but favour the frequency of these crimes. On the contrary, an anarchist milieu would raise the moral level of humanity. Man will understand that he has no rights over a woman who gives herself to another man, since that woman does nothing but follow her nature. Consequently crimes, in a future society, will become increasingly rare, until they disappear completely.

Monsieur, I am going to summarize for you my ideal of an anarchist society. No more authority, which is far more contrary to human happiness than the few excesses that could occur at the beginning of a free society. In place of the current authoritarian organization, the grouping of individuals by sympathies and affinities without laws or leaders. No more

private property; the gathering in common of products; each one working and consuming according to his needs, which is to say, as he wishes. No more family, selfish and bourgeois, making man the property of woman and woman the property of man; no more demanding of two beings who loved each other but a moment that they remain attached till the end of their days. Nature is capricious: it always demands new sensations. It wants free love. This is why we want free unions. No more fatherlands, no more hatred between brothers, pitting against each other men who have never set eyes on each other. Replacement of the narrow and petty attachment of the chauvinist for his country by the large and fruitful love of all of humanity, without distinction of race or colour. No more religions, forged by priests to degrade the masses and give them the hope of a better life, while they themselves enjoy life in the here and now. On the contrary, the continual expansion of the sciences, put within the grasp of every being who will feel attached to their study, little by little bringing all men to a materialist consciousness. The particular study of hypnotic phenomena, which science is beginning to become aware of, in order to unmask the charlatans who present to the ignorant, in a marvellous and superstitious light, facts which are purely physical. In a word, absolutely no more hindrances to the free development of human nature. The free blossoming of physical, cerebral and mental faculties.

I am not so optimistic as to believe that a society built on such foundations will arrive at perfect harmony. But I have the profound conviction that two or three generations will suffice to tear mankind from the influence of the artificial civilization which it submits to today and to return it to the state of nature, which is the state of goodness and of love. But in order to make victorious this ideal, to set anarchist society on a solid base, we must begin with the work of destruction. The old, worm-eaten edifice must be torn down. This is what

we are doing. The bourgeoisie claims that we will never arrive at our goal. The future, the very near future, will teach them. Vive l'Anarchie!"

I interpret the emphases of this letter in the following way:

- a) Anarchy is free thought and not dogma. Anarchists are free to accept or reject the ideas of those involved in its discussions at their own recognisance;
- b) Henry impugns the current social system as a product of authority and property, ideologies which are to blame for all society's ills. They exist in order to propagate a system of coercion akin to slavery. As a consequence, there is no solution but that they be destroyed;
- c) Henry imagines anarchists as those who naturally orientate themselves towards communism, freedom of action and thought, and equality, as well as being welcoming of diversity, simply because they lead to better outcomes;
- d) In anarchy, people act according to their leanings – and are free to do so;
- e) Henry believes that, in a society in which people are free to do as they will, their burdens will be significantly reduced since working together for yourselves is both more efficient and better motivated. People would, in time, come to understand that a few hours cooperation with others is actually just helping yourself too;
- f) In a future scenario of anarchy where everyone directs their own lives completely, Henry imagines it is better to feed the few idle he imagines would be left (most willingly doing as they need to in order to make their own lives) rather than maintain entire carceral institutions like police, courts and prisons in order to coerce them;
- g) Henry believes that an anarchist society organised according to personal inclination and free association, that is devoid of both authority and property, will naturally

demotivate and remove all kinds of crimes and antisocial behaviours we currently see manifested today – and without having to do anything else;

h) Henry believes a man has no rights over a woman's sexuality and that any woman is free to engage that sexuality exactly as she desires;

i) Henry looks to replace authority with sympathy and affinity, property with resources held in common, family and marriage with free love, fatherlands and chauvinistic patriotism with a human affection, and religion with a free-thinking, scientifically inquisitive mind. He wants to end forced artificiality and replace it with people who act according to their nature;

j) Henry believes that, in order to build, one must first destroy those things which impede the new creation.

Sante Caserio

The deaths of Vaillant and Henry, at the hands of the French state, had their own further effects. One of those they impacted upon especially was the Italian son of a peasant family, Sante Caserio. His father had died while he was young from a deficient diet and, aged only 10, Caserio left the family home and went to Milan where he got a job as an apprentice to a baker and later met his first anarchists. Whilst in Milan he joined the anarchist group "On Foot" [which meant "without money"] and he shared bread with unemployed people along with anarchist pamphlets he printed himself from the proceeds of his poor salary. In 1892, not yet even 20 years old, he was imprisoned in Italy for his sharing of anarchist literature. Later, when singled out and identified at a demonstration in Italy, he was forced to flee the country, first to Switzerland and then to France and the anarchist stronghold of Lyon. In June 1894, incensed at what had

happened to Vaillant and Henry, a 20 year old Caserio would stab the French President, Marie François Sadi Carnot, to death after a banquet as an act of vengeance and retribution. Like the three men I have concentrated on before him, he suffered death by guillotine for his actions. I have two documents to present in relation to Sante Caserio as well. The first is a brief document reporting on his trial. The second is his equally brief defence speech to the court. I reproduce them one after the other as follows:

Trial Report (Caserio)

"Recalling the childhood of Caserio, the president said to him, 'You attended school but you never received any prizes.' Caserio answered, 'I regret not having had more education. I would have been stronger.'

Q: And what would you have done with that strength?

A: I would have used it for the ideal.

Questioned about his relations with the lawyer Gori [a key Italian anarchist of the time], he answered: 'I didn't frequent Gori's conferences in 1891, but I read pamphlets and I paid closer attention to what was in them than to those he signed. In any case, I will lay out my doctrines.'

The president then asked him about his relations with the Italian anarchists, but Caserio remained silent on this point. 'I am a baker,' he said, 'not a policeman ...'

Q: Recount your crime, Caserio.

A: At the moment when the last cavalrymen of the escort passed in front of me, I opened my jacket. The dagger was in the inside right-hand pocket, against my chest, with the handle up. I grabbed it with my left hand and with one movement shoved the two young people standing in front of me, took the handle with my right hand, and with my left

pushed off the sheath, which fell to the ground. I quickly, but without leaping, headed straight for the president, following an oblique line in the direction opposite that of the carriage's movement. I put my left hand on the edge of the carriage and, with a slightly downward blow, my palm backward and my fingers pointed down, I plunged my dagger into the president's breast up to the hilt. (And Caserio, with an unspeakable cynicism, demonstrated the way he used the dagger against the president.) My hand touched his jacket. I left the dagger in the president's chest and a piece of newspaper remained on the handle. In delivering the blow I shouted -loudly or not, I don't know- 'Vive la Révolution!' When I struck him M. Carnot looked me in the face. I then retreated, shouting 'Vive la Révolution.'

Q: You said that the president's look produced a strong sensation in you.

A: I felt no emotion.

Q: You wanted to strike him in the heart but your blow was delivered lower than you'd thought. Once the blow was delivered you fled. Seeing that you weren't immediately arrested and that no one seemed to have understood what you'd done you started running, shouting 'Vive l'Anarchie.' You were going to disappear in the crowd. They refused to let you pass. Someone behind you shouted, 'Arrest him!' Twenty policemen grabbed you and locked you up in a sure place. (M. Breuillac then told of M. Carnot's final moments. The best doctors of our city did all they could to save so precious a life.) The result of your dagger blow, Caserio, was M. Carnot's death. You know this?

A: (In a weak voice) Yes, I know.

Q: And it's because you are an anarchist that you killed M. Carnot. You hate all heads of state?

A: Yes, sir.

Q: You premeditated your crime. You admit this.

A: I'll answer in my declaration.

Ending his questioning the president of the tribunal said to Caserio, 'Outside your political crime you killed a mother and father.' Caserio then expounded at length in Italian. 'No one had pity for the wives and children of the anarchists guillotined in France, hung in America, shot by firing squads in Spain.' The interpreter was hardly able to translate the accused's words, which he mangled, giving rise to protests from the journalists."

There are three points to note here as follows:

- a) Caserio was basically subject to anarchist values and education from childhood. He wishes he had had more formal education so it could have better supported his ideals;
- b) Caserio despises all heads of state because they are heads of states;
- c) Caserio strongly feels that anarchists are discriminated against and treated without mercy.

Defence Speech (Caserio)

"Gentlemen of the jury, I'm not going to defend myself but rather explain my action. While still young I learned that present society is poorly organized, so poorly that every day many unfortunates commit suicide, leaving wives and children in the most terrible distress. Workers in their thousands look for work and can't find any. Poor families beg for their food and shiver from the cold. They suffer the worst poverty. The youngest ask their poor mothers for food and the latter can't give them any because they don't have anything. The

few things that were in the house were already sold or traded. All they can do is ask for alms; they're often arrested for vagabondage.

I left my native land because I was often brought to tears upon seeing little girls of eight or ten forced to work fifteen hours a day for a miserable wage of twenty centimes. Young women of eighteen or twenty also work twenty hours a day for a laughable salary. And this doesn't only happen to my compatriots, but to all workers who sweat all day long for a morsel of bread while their labour brings in money in abundance. The workers are forced to live under the most wretched conditions and their food consists of a bit of bread, a few spoonfuls of rice, and water. And so when they reach the age of thirty or forty they're dying of fatigue and die in hospitals. What's more, as a consequence of their poor diets and overwork these sad creatures are devoured in their hundreds by pellagra, an illness that, in my country, attacks, as the doctors say, those who are malnourished and who lead a hard and deprived existence.

I saw that there are some people who are hungry and some children who suffer while food and clothing are abundant in the cities. I saw several great industries full of clothing and wool products and I also saw warehouses full of wheat and corn that would be suitable for those who needed them. And from another point of view, I saw thousands of people who don't work, who produce nothing, and who live thanks to the labour of others; who every day spend thousands of francs to amuse themselves; who corrupt the daughters of workers; who own lodgings with forty or fifty rooms, twenty or thirty horses, and several servants: in a word, all the pleasures of life. I believe in God, but when I see such inequality among men, I recognize that it isn't God who created man but man who created God. And I discovered

that those who want their property respected have an interest in preaching paradise and hell and keeping the people in a state of ignorance.

A short time ago, Vaillant threw a bomb in the Chamber of Deputies in protest against the current system of society. He killed no one and only wounded a few people. But bourgeois justice condemned him to death. And not satisfied with the condemnation of the guilty man, it pursued the anarchists and arrested not only those who knew Vaillant, but even those who attended an anarchist lecture. The government didn't think of their wives and children. It didn't consider that a man held in a cell isn't the only one to suffer, that his little ones ask for bread. Bourgeois justice didn't trouble itself with these innocents, who don't even know what society is. It's not their fault if their fathers are in prison; all they want to do is eat. The government went so far as to search people's private homes, to open personal letters, to prohibit lectures and meetings and practiced the most infamous oppression against us. Even today hundreds of anarchists are arrested for having written an article in a newspaper or for having expressed an opinion in public.

Well then, if the government employs guns, chains, and prisons against us, must we anarchists, who defend our lives, remain locked in our houses? No. On the contrary, we answer governments with dynamite, bombs, the stylus, and the dagger. In a word, we must do all we can to destroy the bourgeoisie and government. Gentlemen of the jury, you who are the representatives of bourgeois society, if you want my head, take it. But don't think that in doing so you are stopping the anarchist movement. Beware: man reaps what he sows."

The points I take away from this short speech are as follows:

- a) Sante Caserio, as the other accused above, does not actually offer a “defence” in court. He does not recognise the court’s authority to judge him. Instead, he “explains” himself in what is actually a didactic speech;
- b) Caserio argues that society is terribly organised and creates consequential poverty by being organised as it is. In this situation, people are literally and habitually worked to death so others, who do none of that work, can profit hugely from their labour;
- c) Caserio intimates that religion preaches a boss and an order because those who rule this world need to justify a boss and an order;
- d) Caserio complains that the totally uncaring oppression of the state is visited upon anarchists – or even anyone who simply attends one of their meetings to hear them speak – and without caring about any collateral damage from doing so;
- e) As a consequence, Caserio declares self-defence as not only permissible but as to be expected – and notably against “the bourgeoisie and the government”. This is not simply about officials for him but all who support this society as it currently is.

Clément Duval

Clément Duval, the last individual I will consider here, was someone influential in the development of anarchist illegalism generally, most notably after breaking into the house of a wealthy Parisian to steal 15,000 francs and some other things before setting the place on fire (that last bit wasn’t planned). His crime, and its punishment, happened a few years before those of the others mentioned here in 1886. He was captured when trying to get rid of his booty as he was identified (likely through snitches and/or trusting

the wrong people) and stabbed a gendarme in the act of being arrested (which the gendarme survived). He was subsequently sentenced to death but had this sentence commuted to lifetime deportation and hard labour at the French prison colony of Devil's Island in French Guiana (which some argue is the actual inspiration for the book and film *Papillon*). He would remain there for fourteen years and make almost twenty escape attempts before one finally succeeded. Thereafter, he made his way to New York over about the next couple of years, being received there by Luigi Galleani and his Italian anarchists. As with my earlier characters, I will quote two documents in regard to Duval, the first his defence speech in court and the second a letter he wrote in jail that was published in the anarchist paper *Le Révolté*. Both were influential in informing future anarchist attitudes, including those of the men I have discussed before him:

Defence Speech (Duval)

"While I do not recognize your right to pose to me the questions that you have, I have responded to you as the accused. Now, you are the ones that I am accusing. I do not pretend to defend myself. To what end would this serve me, in front of those as well armed as you, having soldiers, cannons, police, and finally an army of mercenaries as your henchmen? Let's be logical, you are in power, taking advantage of it, and if you still need the head of yet another anarchist, take it, and when our day comes we will take this into account, and I have the firm hope that on that day the anarchists will rise to the occasion. They will be without pity, because never will they reach the number of your victims. It is not only you who I am addressing, but to all of this selfish, cruel, corrupt society, where on one side we see an orgy and on the other misery!

You have accused me of theft, as if a worker that has nothing could be a thief. No, theft exists only in the exploitation of man by man, in a word by those who live at the expense of the working class. It was not a theft that I committed, but a just restitution made in the name of humanity, this money was to serve for making revolutionary propaganda, through writing and by the deed. To make newspapers and leaflets to show people the truth; it has been a long time that they have been deceived. To show the cure to those who are ill. I busy myself with the chemistry and prepare what is needed for the day of battle, the day when the workers, conscious, will leave their torpor, their slump. Because it is time that this diabolic machination of the old world disappear, to give place to institutions where all will find a fate that is more fair, which does not exist but within anarchist communism. Because anarchy is the negation of all authority. And anarchy is the biggest social wound, because man is not free, and one must become free to do all that one wants, as long as one does not infringe upon the liberty of their fellow - for then one would become a despot in turn.

In communism, man gives to society according to his skills and strengths, and should receive according to his needs. Men group themselves, find each other according to their character, their skills, their affinities, taking as an example the group which functions the best, away from vanity, foolish pride, not seeking to do better than one's comrade for one can do better for one's self. Out of this will come the useful masterpieces, people's intelligence no longer reduced to nothing but capital, because men would be able to evolve freely, no longer under the despotic yoke of authority, of individual property. And these groups can mutually exchange their products, unhindered. Learning, and feeling good about governing themselves, they will federate and will be nothing more than a big family of workers associated together for the happiness of all - one for all, all for one - knowing only a single law: the law of solidarity and reciprocity. No more gold, base metal for which I am here and

which I despise. Base metal, the cause of all the evils and vices that afflict humanity. Base metal, with which men's conscience is bought!

With anarchist communism, there is no more exploitation of man by man, no more of these managers of sweat, no more salesmen with a mercantile spirit, rapacious, selfish, poisoning, falsifying their products and their commodities, thereby bringing the degradation of mankind. You cannot deny this, because you see this all the way to the toy salesmen, who already poison with these toys the poor little creatures who are barely born. And these factories, where they play with the workers lives with an unparalleled shamelessness, like in the factories of white lead where in only a few months the workers find themselves paralysed and soon dead, or in the tinsmiths who in little time become bald, crippled, weakened in the bones and die in agony!

There are scientists who know that they can replace these unhealthy products with innocuous ones. The doctors who see these unfortunates twist in such agony and who leave things to continue, they allow these crimes against humanity to happen. It is even better, they decorate the heads of the factories, and they award them honorary awards in memory of the service they have given to industry and humanity. And how many of these unhealthy industries are there? The number would be too large to count them all, not to mention the foul and unhealthy capitalist prisons where the worker, imprisoned for ten or twelve hours is obligated, for the sake of conserving his family's bread, to incur the vexations, the humiliation of an insolent convict, missing only the whip for us all to recall the heyday of ancient slavery and medieval serfdom. And the unfortunate miners, imprisoned five or six hundred feet underground, seeing the light of day no more than once a week and when, tired of so much misery and suffering, they lift their heads to reclaim their right to sunlight

and to the banquet of life: quickly the army is in the countryside at the service of the exploiters, and we shoot this scoundrel! The proof doesn't default.

And the exploitation of man by man is nothing compared to that experienced by women. Nature is already thankless in this regard, to make them sick 15 days of the month, but we hardly take this into account: flesh for profit, flesh for fun, this is the fate of women. How many young girls arrive from the countryside, full of strength and health, only to be enclosed in the workshops, in rooms where there is room for four and they are fifteen, twenty, without air, breathing nothing but pollution: hardships they are forced to self-impose. By six months they are anaemic. From there the sickness, weakness, and dislike of work that is not even sufficient to meet their needs drives these unfortunates to prostitution. What does society do for these victims? It rejects them from her breast, like the leper, puts them on the map, enrolls them with the police and makes informers of their lovers.

And do you think the workers, with noble and generous sentiments, can see this picture of the human life unfurling constantly before their eyes without being revolted? He who feels all these effects, who is constantly a victim of them, morally, physically, and materially: he who is taken at twenty years old to pay his taxes in blood, cannon fodder to defend the property and privileges of his masters: and if he returns from this butchery, he returns maimed or with a sickness that renders him half crippled, making him go from hospital to hospital serving therefore as experimental flesh for these messieurs of science. I know what I speak of, I who have returned from the carnage with two wounds and rheumatism, a sickness that has given me four years in the hospital and which prevents me from working six months of the year. As an incentive, if you do not have the courage to give them my head

as they ask, I will die in prison. And these crimes are committed in broad daylight, after being plotted in the corridors of the government, under the influence of a clique, or the caprice of a woman, while shouting over the rooftops: The people are sovereign, The Nation is sovereign, and under the buzz words of patronage - Glory, Honour, Homeland, as if there were several homelands between all beings living on the same planet. No! The anarchists have but one party, and that is humanity.

It is also, in the name of civilization that exists these distant expeditions where thousands of men are killed with a savage ferocity. It is in the name of civilization that we plunder, that we burn, that we massacre an entire people who demand nothing [more] than to live peacefully in their homes. And these crimes are committed with impunity because the law doesn't cover this type of theft and armed robbery, au contraire: We award medals to those who have led all this carnage, medals to the mercenaries who have taken part, in memory of their good deeds, and these unconscious ones are proud to wear this insignia which is nothing but a diploma of assassination. But on the other hand, the law severely punishes the worker to whom society refuses the right to exist and who has the courage to take what is necessary which he lacks, where there is superfluous amounts. Oh! And then this one is treated like a thief, brought before the court and finally returns to end his days in prison. Voila! The logic of our current society. Ah well, this is the crime that I am here for: for not recognizing the right of these people to die of plenty while the producers, the creators of all social wealth, starve. Yes, I am the enemy of individual property and it has been a long time that I have said, along with Proudhon, that property is theft.

In effect, how does one acquire property, if not through theft, by exploiting one's fellows, giving three francs to the exploited for a job which will bring back ten for the exploiter? And

the little exploiters don't do it any differently. Evidence: I have seen my companion do work as the second hand, two little detached pieces of lace and pearls, for which he was paid seven and a half centimes a piece. Fifteen days later, doing the same work as the first hand, he was paid fifty five centimes a piece. So do you think that a conscious worker could be so stupid as to do the lesser work to pay the rent and then give back to the same exploiter-owner a part of his salary which had been given to him? And he will see his wife and children forced to deprive themselves of things most necessary for life, while the idle, with this money, goes to the stock exchange or somewhere else to speculate, play the market on the misery of the people, or wallow in some fashionable boudoir in the arms of an unwell girl, who to live is forced to give her flesh to others for pleasure, despite the disgust that it inspires in her.

As I do not want myself to be made an accomplice of the likes of these dishonourables, this is why I do not pay rent (for which you reproach me), not wanting myself to be robbed by this thief, this vulture that we call an owner, and this is why I had received bad references in the different areas that I have lived. Good references are only given for the vile and the grovelling, for those who have no backbone. Because the law is in all things the accomplices of those who own, they throw away the anathema at the workers who lift their heads proudly, who retain their dignity by revolting against abuse, injustices, against the monsters who make up the owning class.

But, it has been a long time since I have reckoned with anything but my conscience, mocking the fools and the wicked, feeling certain that I have the esteem of men of heart who have known me closely. This is why I am telling you: you are not condemning me as a thief, but as a conscious worker, who does not consider oneself to be a beast of burden, taxable and

thanklessly exploited, and who recognizes the undeniable right that nature gives to all human beings: the right to existence. And if society refuses us this right, we must take it with unshaking hands (which would be a cowardice in a society where all abounds, where everything is in abundance, where what should be a source of well being is nothing more than a source of misery)... Why? Because everything is monopolized by a handful of idlers who burst from indigestion while the workers are continually searching for a loaf of bread.

No! I am not a robber but one who has been robbed, someone who brings justice, who says that everything belongs to everyone, and that it is this clear logic of the anarchist idea, which makes your legs tremble. No, I am not a thief but a sincere revolutionary, who has the courage of his convictions and who is devoted to his cause. Within current society, [where] money is the nerve of war, I would do all that is within my power to procure it to serve this noble and just cause which would purge humanity of all of the tyrannies, the persecutions that it has suffered so cruelly. Ah! I have only one regret, which is to have fallen too early into your hands, this preventing me from satisfying an implacable hatred, a thirst for vengeance that I have vowed upon so infamous a society. But what consoles me is that there are combatants that remain, because despite all the persecution, the anarchist idea has germinated and the theoretical revolution is ending, being quickly replaced by the practice of action. Oh, then, that day - rotten society, governments, magistrates, exploiters of all kinds, you have lived! Long live social revolution, long live anarchy!"

I summarise Duval's ideas here in the following ways:

a) Duval impugns not officials but society at large;

- b) Duval redefines “theft” as systematic exploitation of one person by another, thus relativising to nothing the idea that someone in poverty just looking to survive is guilty of any crime in taking what they need to do so;
- c) Duval regards society, in its capitalist and authoritarian guise, as a sickness;
- d) Duval regards anarchy as fairness, freedom for all so long as they don’t infringe on others, mutual exchange, something self-governing and federative, about solidarity and reciprocity, and without money, authority or property. He can describe the whole as “anarchist communism”;
- e) Duval regards the capitalist system as exploitation and death constructed to benefit some at the expense of others;
- f) Duval impugns giving medals to soldiers who fight in wars as giving them a “diploma of assassination”;
- g) Duval regards his own crime, and the reason for his trial, as his refusal to recognise that some people should die in plenty while those who produced that same plenty starve;
- h) Duval, along with Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, believes that legal or private property is theft and that such a thing can only in reality be acquired by exploitation and coercion;
- i) Duval decries a system in which one person is paid a small amount for making a thing but another is paid a high price for selling the thing they had nothing to do with producing;
- j) Duval says that he doesn’t pay rent on the principle that landlords are examples of thieves;
- k) Duval believes it is necessary that everyone should have a backbone as one must stand up for one’s right to exist lest it be taken from them;

- l) Duval states that the law protects owners, it is an authoritarian instrument to protect property;
- m) Duval believes he stands condemned by the court (as a representative of society's values and laws) because he believes he has a right to exist without being exploited for it;
- n) Duval states that "everything belongs to everyone" as an example of commonist (if not also communist) thinking.

A Letter from Mazas Prison (Duval)

Companions,

Although I am not well known to you, you know that I am an anarchist. I am writing this letter to you to protest against the insanities that must have leaked out about me in particular and about the anarchists in general in all different kinds of newspapers which joined together to say, when I was arrested, that I was an ex-convict and had already been convicted of theft. As if you could call someone a thief who was a worker who had nothing but misery whereas for me theft does not exist except in the exploitation of man by man, in short, in the existence of everyone who lives at the expense of the producing class.

Here is why and how I committed the offense that they call theft. In 1870 I was, like so many others, stupid enough to go and defend the property and privileges of others; but I was 20 years old. From the war I brought back two wounds and rheumatism—a terrible sickness that has already cost me four years in the hospital. After serving as cannon fodder, I served as a guinea pig for the gentlemen of science. They made me take more than a kilo

of sodium salicylate, which drastically weakened my eyesight. Proof is that at 36 years old I am wearing glasses and the bosses do not like that.

So, in 1878 I got out after three months in the hospital. I started working again for eight days; I got sick again; I stayed home for a month. I had two children and my companion got sick as well. No money and no bread in the house. Even though I was not part of the anarchist movement, which did not exist or was very small at the time (the study of sociology had not ended and it was still only in an embryonic state, plus they had not yet cut off the heads of anarchists to spread it), I had already, long before, freed myself of the prejudices that block the minds of the masses, an enemy of all authority.

I was an anarchist in heart, in love with what was beautiful, grand, generous, revolting against all abuses and injustices. From this fact I recognized the undeniable right that nature gave to every human being: the right to exist. An opportunity presented itself. With no qualms I put my hand in a stationmaster's cash box. I took my hand out with 80 francs. 80 francs does not go far when you have nothing—medicine is expensive.

Therefore, I decided to go back and visit the stationmaster's cash box, telling myself, "So what? The company steals enough from its employees. I who have absolutely nothing can very well take a little of its surplus." What a bad idea because I was arrested there and sentenced to a year in prison. I am not embarrassed by this conviction, I take full responsibility. When society refuses you the right to exist, you have to take it and not help it along, which is cowardice.

There, companions, is the exact truth of my conviction. No companion knew about it, so I took sole responsibility for my actions and whoever takes advantage of human stupidity to try to discredit such a just and noble idea as the one that the anarchists defend, trying to dump on the whole of it the faults and wrongs (if faults and wrongs they are) of one of its defenders, is a cretin who trembles before the strict logic of the anarchist idea.

I thought that these explanations might be necessary for the anarchist companions, so I would appreciate it if you would include my letter in the next issue of Révolté.

Clément Duval, Mazas Prison, October 24 1886.

I interpret this letter in the following ways:

- a) Duval thinks that systematic exploiters are the real thieves;
- b) He considers wars as being fought by dupes who kill and maim strangers only to secure the privileges of others;
- c) Duval believes that oppression of anarchists drives the greater taking up of anarchist beliefs;
- d) Duval was a self-taught anarchist. No one taught it to him;
- e) Duval believes in the right of existence which he also equates with a right of direct action to maintain that same existence – there can be no existence where you are not allowed to maintain it;
- f) Consequently, Duval takes full responsibility for the things he does to maintain himself.

Anarchist Values: An Anarchy of Existence

After these interesting documents and my analyses of what they were saying in simple terms, it remains for me to explain, in my own words and terms, what was going on here in the words of these anarchists from the past, what the problem they described was and what the solutions they prescribed were. In doing so, of course, it will be seen that our basic problems today are no different and their solutions still stand as valid. That, after all, is why we are here and why I am writing this short book. What it seems to me we have in the examples of these men, none of whom, I am sure, wanted the lives (and deaths) that they found themselves led into by societies that attacked them, is the scream of painful oppression visited upon them by a society, and its representatives, overcome by the lust of greed for wealth and power. This was even true of those who had relatively little of either but had been co-opted into the social and political system which had this greed as its driving and motivating force. One means by which such societies survive is by indoctrinating their members into a cult of greed and power. They organise themselves in such a way as power and wealth is the only thing that can succeed and they educate their members that nothing else can ever, or has ever, worked. Its a successful strategy – and unsurprisingly so when every major institution and media organisation is singing from the same hymn sheet and every family and nation is organised so as to repeat it back to those it raises.

These anarchists, then, were the cry of those caught up in the horror of nascent capitalism, not yet brought under even a modicum of control by legislation designed to protect workers' interests, and nation states, still then actively and openly colonialist entities which derived their strength from the use of force and violence (as states

habitually do). But they were the cry of those caught up in this as those who had seen through it and who saw, and experienced, its real world consequences, not only in their own lives but also in the lives of others. And they felt moved to act. And so they did. Being in similar places, their analyses of the situation were quite similar. Their solutions are largely compatible too and probably because they were reading the same anarchist newspapers and journals and mixing with similar people. We should not think of them as a mass of known associates, however, for anarchism has never simply been like that. Like any belief or philosophy, it has (and had) its factions. Henry, for example, points out that almost none of the anarchists knew who Vaillant was and this is indicative of the independence anarchists in general cherish, the ability to act for oneself even if one imagines to also act on behalf of others. Any mass contains individual voices and any of these voices can make its own cry at any time it likes if it is moved so to do. Often individual action is safer, too, since it cuts down on those who can betray it.

I want to make thirteen points in rounding up what these brave and implacable anarchists had to say and in coming to say what I think it means – in their past, our present and any future. This will encompass their analysis of their conditions (which are often still also ours) and their solutions – which are their articulations of anarchy. What I think this will result in is the reasonable expression of a solidly mainstream anarchism (from which individual anarchists and others have always been free to diverge, or to personalise as they will, since anarchy has neither arbiters nor conditions of entry nor rules to obey). For myself, I should point out that I distinguish between anarchy, a state of existence, and anarchism, at best an ethos of life and its organisation. I favour the former over the latter. Why that is will hopefully become increasingly obvious in the course of making the following thirteen points:

1. I intend to begin with the points in which the anarchists analysed their society. The first of these is the recognition of an exploited, oppressed and coerced mass of working people (in a class analysis called “the working class”, people who did often insanely long working hours of physically debilitating work for minimal pay) who were parasitically preyed upon by a class of bosses or owners who reaped profits, entirely as a result of the work of the working class, which far outstripped the pay the workers who produced that profit received. The anarchists conceived of this as systematic, a forced system of social relations, a situation in which you had to play a part in this sick, incarcerating prison game of “work” or risk total penury and starvation. Such a system of relations is, thus, carceral, imprisoning, coercive inasmuch as people are manipulated into, and within, it, exploitative by design and socially and economically oppressive, designed to keep the workers poor so that the owners and bosses are free not to be. Such a system of relations is thus also a form of social inequality by design.

2. One conclusion of this analysis we see from our sample of anarchists is the notion that society has been deliberately organised very, very badly, in such a way as it doesn’t pay (literally!) for most people to be in it since it becomes an engine of their prolonged (and designed) misery. Of course, in reality it has been arranged by rich and powerful people who can coerce others to maintain their riches and their power but the corollary of this, which our anarchists, at least, were happy to shout out, is that such a society simply doesn’t work for most of us. As a consequence, they suggested other, better ways to do that organising which I shall come to shortly.

A further corollary of the way this capitalist-authoritarian society has been designed, however, is that the design of this system of relations then creates the very problems

(like criminality) it claims to want to eradicate. But stealing, for example, could be resolved by eradicating poverty so that no one lacked the means of life (and so had very little motivation to steal at all). This current system of relations, however, does not want to do that because it is in the grip of the idea that the only way to get people to work is to force them to have to and that, if you don't, if you just provide them with the basics of life for free, they will consequently refuse to work and you, a boss or an owner, will not be able to profit any longer from their coerced and exploited labour.

A modern day example of exactly this mentality is the refusal of many to seriously engage with the idea of Universal Basic Income even though EVERY SINGLE STUDY done on it shows that people in receipt of the basics of life do not just sit on their asses and refuse to work. Many, in fact, use the security of having the basics to make something of themselves, their lives and their skills and abilities to create, engage with others and build socially useful enterprises. This is exactly what the anarchists I have discussed above said they would do for they seem to agree that, being given the dignity of being able to maintain their lives without fear, people naturally want to do something useful with them. But the capitalist and the authoritarian do not think this. They think that people must be coerced, forced and manipulated. They think they are equally resources to be exploited and owned. And, that, for the anarchists, was a problem big enough to require both our resistance to it and our rebellion against it.

3. What, ideologically speaking, was the problem for the anarchists then? Pretty much all of them mention "property" and "authority" which their French forebear, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, also agreed with, seeing, like them, that they also go together. "Property" here means legal property or private property, a right of legal ownership giving one

exclusive rights in law to possess and make use of a thing. What is not here meant is a thing you have and use more simply put (often referred to by some as “use rights”). Property in the sense meant here could be something you could *never* use yourself – like a large stock of houses or a vast tract of land or a whole supply of a natural resource. It is property held to be exploited and made use of for profit since there would not be much other reason for claiming it as your property to begin with.

Such a sense of property, of course, requires an authority (an institution in a social position of power regarded as an arbiter with the necessary means of force and violence to make its rulings effective) to guarantee it remains yours and doesn’t get used by others beyond your control (which, as an owner, you don’t want) and this, in anarchist analysis, is pretty much what states, and their maintainers, governments, exist to do. States, technically, do not exist. They are just pure ideas which only exist in human experience because things called governments, and the people they rule over, act as if they do. Think of it, if you like, as you do of money. Money is only worth anything because people act as if it is. It is actually fairly worthless bits of waxy paper and metal – or, now, even just numbers stored on a hard drive which is worth even less. But, because people socially agree on a meaning or worth for it, it magically obtains it. States are similar. They don’t really exist. They are just conjured into existence by the agreements of people which then create the relations which manifest their reality. If we changed our minds they could disappear as quickly as we could blink. (Property in general is the same, of course. No one functionally owns anything if no one agrees to act as if they do.)

Property and authority may be illusions but they are real and powerful illusions with obvious deleterious material effects (as most of our common illusions are). Henry adds

in “fatherland” and “family” to these illusions as well and I grant him their addition as further confining and socially controlling ideas. Vaillant talks about “a yoke of capital” and that makes sense too in a world in which both imaginary and material resource motivates human interests, actions and decisions and is made as unavoidable as possible for all. What all these things – property, authority, fatherland, family, capital – do is act as tools creating social power and instantiating forms of slavery and inequality. We need to think of them primarily as relational ideas, ideas which seek to form, and set in stone, certain sets of social relationships – parents as bosses of children, presidents and prime ministers as bosses of citizens, owners of businesses as bosses of their employees, owners of things as controllers over who can use the things, the rich as controllers of everything they can buy, etc. All of these are further social fictions because, of course, you don’t *have* to do what your dad or your boss or the president (or the cop) or the landlord says. You don’t *have* to consider them your boss at all. But there may be consequences if you don’t (which come from the social power these systems of relations have created). In anarchist thinking, as my examples in this book suggest, this all results in *an incarcerating system of relationships, a hierarchical system of relations*. You are, in various ways, either boss or bossed. And most of us are bossed.

4. This is, very importantly, backed up by years and years of moral indoctrination. Hierarchical values, patriarchal values, dominating values, systems of thought in which there are morally obligating things called “good” and “evil”, are literally put into us from birth. The people doing this might not (and probably don’t!) even realise what they are doing but what they are doing is teaching us that people are not free, people cannot do as they please and people cannot decide for themselves what matters and what doesn’t. This is where our incarceration begins as our intellects are taught and groomed to

develop not merely ethical sensibilities but particular forms of ethics. The former would teach a form of active prudence which many would agree was useful for life. The latter teaches good guys and bad guys, partiality, hate. It teaches you to despise and reject your own autonomy over yourself and to defer to the authority of others, an authority not simply prudent to follow but morally obligating. It teaches you there are people you should obey and situations in which you should follow orders. It robs you of your agency and teaches you custom and law. This morality is twisted, forced, arbitrary, artificial, incarcerating and false. Pretty much all anarchists, including the ones I have discussed here, realise that in order to get out from under the destructive authoritarian capitalist relations they diagnosed, we need to reject such bourgeois morality as of first importance. I will have more to say about this below.

5. A notable aspect of the five analyses of the social situation I looked at above was that they didn't simply impugn the government – they impugned a class of people as well, the bourgeoisie. Today we might call this the middle classes but, whatever we call it, it means that class of people who basically work, administratively, bureaucratically and functionally, to make the state, government and capitalism (“property and authority”) work in society. They are the bosses, middle managers, owners and landlords of our experience. They are those without whom the forced systems of property and authority could not work for, of course, any system of relations needs things to be done to keep them going and people to do them. This is what those called by my anarchists “the bourgeoisie” provide. The anarchists I have discussed thus generally thought that if you were willingly playing the game of capitalist society then, in effect, the responsibility for it was yours too. We see that attitude explicitly, for example, in the words of Henry who targets them on purpose. Duval regards the reclusive rich who have extracted their

wealth from others as fair game. Others, like Vaillant, make their assault on government officials. Ravachol targeted judges. In each case, however, the active thought was: "Someone is responsible for all the poverty and misery that is suffered. Someone keeps it going. They are our enemy." That enemy was "the bourgeoisie and the government".

6. I come now, in my sixth point, to constructing the anarchist case for an alternative to the world conjured by capitalists, authoritarians and those they have intellectually, morally, politically and economically captured. I begin here by noting, quite simply, that the anarchists, as their speeches and letters have shown, conceived of a world and its relations based on different values. It is values which give us our ethics and, having different values, it follows that the ethics thereafter can only be different too. This can be quite plainly seen throughout the documents that I have provided as the material basis of my evidence in this book. These anarchists, in prisons or courts, simply do not think and value like those who seek to judge or condemn them. They do not think of the working class as fodder for society or things to be used up in providing profit for others. They do not think of human beings as those without autonomy or agency or simply a will and desire and needs of their own. They do not imagine that obedience to a higher authority is something to be expected as part of the very structure of society. They do not think that because you own this and I own nothing that gives you the right to direct my life. They do not think that life is about the habitual exploitation of their fellows or even a whole class of society. In fact, they think these all very strange and dangerous things to think at all.

Anarchists, put simply, do not have the same values or ethics as the bourgeois. They have values and ethics which they have developed FOR THEMSELVES as things which please

them and satisfy their desire for a certain anarchist pragmatism. These values and ethics reorganise the world of relationships and so the world, as humans experience it, completely. Anarchists, with such values and ethics, thus threaten the bourgeois world entirely because that world, composed entirely of the forced relations which make it up, cannot exist if people take up the values and ethics of the anarchist. And that explains the death sentences for, for the rich and powerful of this world of relationships, wanting to change or otherwise reorganise the relationships which make up the capitalist and authoritarian world has always been the biggest crime of all. These are people who do not have the anarchist pragmatism I spoke of a moment ago, a pragmatism which considers the needs of the many and not just of the few, that considers the needs – and the desires – of the have nots and not simply of the haves. It is a pragmatism which says that considering everyone in the round equally will work out better for all of them rather than for just some tiny proportion of them. It is a pragmatism which says that the best way to run a society is to consider the needs and desires of everyone and not just particular someones. It is a pragmatism which says that sharing and reciprocity is a better method of general existence than privately acquiring, accumulating and hoarding. It is a pragmatism which says that personal autonomy and agency and a freedom of association are better than forced and policed incarcerating existences. No wonder the capitalists and the authoritarians have always hated genuine anarchists. Their ways would make them cease to exist.

7. Coming to the anarchist ethos specifically, one thing that stands out clearly about it from the documentary evidence above is that it is a matter of both your own direct action and a personal taking of responsibility. In each case above, and in hundreds of others not brought here as evidence, anarchist men (and women – at the same time as

this women like Louise Michel, Voltairine de Cleyre or Emma Goldman were also making their presence felt and occasionally confronting judges and prison guards because of what they had done as well) took actions in defence of their values, of the lives of others, *simply because they determined to for themselves* – and, if and when caught as a result, did not seek to deny what they had done or why but admitted it openly and plainly, taking full responsibility for it. Not for them the weasel words or legal games in an attempt to “get away with” their deeds. They acted deliberately and honestly and said why. In a world of deceit and dissembling, this is quite refreshing – albeit it will probably seem to those from the other world as naive and possibly stupid.

But the anarchist way is to become the world you want to see. To do that, you must live now as you desire everyone to live in an as yet undiscovered future. To do that, you must become the example you hope everyone else will follow in an as yet uncreated tomorrow. Two absolute pillars of this anarchist way of living which stand out as completely different to the bourgeois way of living are exactly a belief in direct action at the personal level (which equates to beliefs in personal agency and autonomy and the belief that, first of all, one should act for oneself rather than lazily or obediently expecting others to do it for you) and a belief in taking responsibility for oneself and for others. The anarchists above, as their testimonies I hope show clearly, were not just selfish people on the make like any old thief. What thief, like Caserio, prints off anarchist propaganda sheets from the meagre profits of poor baker’s wages? What thief, like Henry, gets motivated to act by the oppression of the poor and state brutality against people they barely know of? What the accounts I have reproduced above give evidence for, instead of personal greed, is a class of people who, seeing oppression, seeing exploitation, seeing coercion, determine to act themselves and determine to act as a

matter of their own personal taking of responsibility. That is a demonstration of their anarchist ethos and their anarchist mentality, of beliefs in direct action motivated by, and from, themselves, and in taking responsibility for what happens in the world in a world in which so many shy away from it.

8. Points one to five, above, laid out what the anarchists sentenced to death saw as the material-ideological problems inherent in their society. Now I come to their solutions. The problems they noted were, of course, materially consequential but they were not simply this for they came, at the intellectual level, from the values of bourgeois society, values the anarchists wished to change. As a result of their anarchist values we get not societies that are incarcerating hierarchies and matters of obedience and punishment but societies that are based on an equality of all people that are matters of uncoerced cooperation, freely given consent and a total lack of exploitation. Some of the anarchists above call the whole “anarchist communism” (to be very much distinguished from “communism” simply put, something which need not be “anarchist” at all) and what they mean by this is societies where people freely consent to join in with social collectives that they all contribute to as matters of their own autonomy and agency and free association and that they all take from as they need.

Some of the anarchists above imagined that money would be abolished as a result of this as, in societies where everything is in common and you simply take what you need from a common stock, there is no need for it. In any case, the point here is that people willingly consent to contribute to a society in common that is working for none of them in preference to others and all both gain what they need from it and find purpose in providing that which they can to it as they so desire. In such a society, nothing is forced

and people are free to direct their own lives. There are no laws to follow and no leaders to obey but one can be sure that those who seek to subvert the relations of autonomous collectivity that are forged in such a society will find these communities of direct action and taking responsibility are both ready and willing to act against those who do. (Thus pirates, for example, marooned those who didn't live up to their self-imposed obligations to which they had previously freely consented.)

The keys of such communities, then, coming from the foundation of an anarchist's values, are both personal and communal. They are about contributing to a collective but also about having a total personal freedom in how to do so but also in even if one wants to do so. (My anarchists here considered that most would naturally want to, as most anarchists in general seem to. There are some other anarchists who are less enthusiastic about that and they go their own way as they will. The collectivist anarchists do not worry themselves about that, however, and get on with their own business exactly as they should.) The anarchists I have interacted with considered that the benefits of this free cooperation or social egoism (as I like to call it) would be myriad in comparison with authoritarian capitalism – and not least because living according to their values no one has to suffer so that someone other than them can become outrageously rich at their expense and then seek to exploit them or wield power over them. Under such a social egoism everyone shares in the success and everyone shares in the failure. Its a cooperative project, a project all commit to equally without leaders or coercions because all have the same stake in it. It is self-organisation in which you are also working together for yourselves with others in the same position as you are. It is valuable not least in what it provides but it should also be noted for its value in terms of what it makes henceforth

impossible – the domination, coercion and exploitation, the deliberate grinding poverty and misery, of authoritarian capitalism.

9. The anarchists I have chosen to discuss come from that era of anarchism noted for “propaganda of the deed”, an aspect of active anarchism in which anarchists engaged in acts designed to present their values and beliefs to the population at large via “communicative acts” or “spectacles”. Often, I must admit, these were violent and destructive, messages of intent which showed that anarchists were not content to let themselves, and others more widely, be used as fuel to power the engine of the rich and privileged. Was this really a necessary aspect of anarchism? Could anarchism be held up as an example of how to live if its “propaganda” was delivered by bomb, gun and dagger? Certainly these anarchists, and anarchists more generally at exactly the time period I have selected, believed so. One cannot build a new, better organised, more hopeful, tomorrow if those who control the present will not let you. So what are you to do? Give in? Complain? Write letters of protest? Use “official channels”? None of these things accord with anarchist values of direct action and taking responsibility. Instead, these men, and others, resolved to signal their intent to their oppressors, and to those oppressed in the same ways by the same people, that there were those determined to strike back, to resist and to revolt. Sante Caserio was then one of those who actually killed one of several heads of state or royalist others killed by anarchists in this time period – which even included President McKinley of the USA in 1901 (although how much of an anarchist his killer, Leon Czolgosz, was is still debated to this day). As such, society was put on notice that there were those determined to live another way, according to different values, and to rock the gilded thrones of any minded to stop them.

10. An associated point here is how anarchists generally, perfectly exemplified in the anarchists I have chosen to discuss here, thought of their violence. They thought of it very specifically as “self-defence”. Are not those who are oppressed, coerced, exploited, dominated, set in political and economic prisons of relationships from which, without drastic action, there is no foreseeable hope of escape, *allowed to defend themselves*? The capitalist authoritarians, the bourgeoisie, said “No, you’re not”. They were just expected to endure and survive it, in sometimes desperate poverty and obvious misery, and “make the best” of a lot they were expected to accept was just theirs to accept. They were expected to know their place and get used to it.

The anarchists above, of course, were some of those who did not and could not and when they deployed violence, as they imagined was their right, they did so as those defending themselves, and others, from the much more systematic violence of an incarcerating system of relationships which had embedded and incarnated violence into the very fabric of social life in institutions like government and cops and courts and prisons and businesses and family and property which dictated almost every aspect of their, and others, lives. *Could they not legitimately defend themselves from that, resist it, reject it?* As people of direct action and taking responsibility, they certainly thought they could and should. The tame and obedient simply get exploited. The rebellious and hard to handle might get to escape to live another kind of life. A life of exploitation or a life of defending yourself and gaining your autonomy and freedom to associate? Anarchists did not think that really a choice at all. It was self-evident. And, in asserting your autonomy in the first place, you instantiate that which you want to become anyway. Defending yourself is becoming those who defend themselves. Acting for yourself, you become one who acts for themselves.

11. Ideologically, on this point of violence, our anarchists here can express views. For example: that “all methods are valid” in securing the socially libertarian futures they sought for themselves and others. Vaillant says he did as he pleased when asked about his bomb throwing – as if no one would have any grounds to question this. (In anarchist mentality he would imagine that they wouldn’t. But if one were of a bourgeois mentality this would sound borderline crazy and like the institution of chaos.) We need to look below the surface of what is going on here, however. The anarchists I have interacted with imagined capitalist-authoritarian society as a prison. Their violence was a tool to try and blow a hole in the prison walls so that they, and/or others, could escape from that prison. Much as happens in Alan Moore’s story *V for Vendetta*, the incarcerating power needed, in their thinking, to be disabled in some regard so that people more generally would be in a situation where they could choose for themselves. They knew full well that those with political and economic power weren’t just going to give them their freedom at the first murmurs of dissent. This is simply not what those with power and authority do. Force, having a winning hand, being able to dominate, is the only language they understand.

Anarchist use of violence, then, is anarchists both asserting their values of autonomy and agency as a matter of their own free will and also a communicative and purposefully destructive act which strikes at power in order to weaken or disable or “terrify” it. It lets the other side know they are in a fight and that anarchists are not tame creatures in their working class zoo/workhouse. Anarchists of the type I have discussed here then saw no ideological reason not to use violence in certain circumstances (as a means to an end) and realised that in an incarcerating situation the alternatives are either to accept your imprisonment or to try and break out of it.

Yet, closing this point, we should remember that this is not a standard anarchist position – for such things do not exist. At the same time as these men existed the anarchist pacifist Leo Tolstoy also existed. Anarchist views on violence and “chemical sciences” (i.e. bombs) also changed over time. Violence was an anarchist tool of some not a necessity for all. It was optional rather than mandated.

12. I have already raised earlier that anarchism for these men was a necessarily moral and intellectual phenomenon as well as merely an economic and political one. Their actions to free themselves were not simply a matter of removing, destroying and permanently disabling societal coercions and incarcerations but of changing who they were and so how they thought and related as people. Above, for example, I contrasted the anarchist mind with the bourgeois mind as two kinds of mentality someone might plausibly have in their situation. Here part of the anarchist mind, in the expression of some of the anarchists I referred to above, was that women become self-directed people even as men were imagined to be. We must recall here, or learn if we were previously unaware, that in the late Victorian society I am talking about women were basically the possessions of men with no political rights of their own. Emma Goldman, in a broadly contemporaneous time period, speaks of them as sex objects who must either get married (whether as a matter of love or not) or sell themselves for sex in order to find themselves a living. Consequently, a woman was socially and morally EXPECTED to marry and to become a brood mare pumping out children for her husband (and, yes, that is exactly how some anarchist women of the time, such as Voltairine de Cleyre, put it).

In the imagined future anarchist dispensation, however, this was not how many anarchists came to imagine it, including some from my selection. Women, they said,

should be as free as men – which means free from the yoke of marriage which some of them expressly wish to eradicate. Women should also be free to take sex partners according to their own desire and inclination – rather than being forced to by reason of economic necessity or marital requirement. (One will here need to recall that in these times marital rape was an imagined impossibility. If a man took sex from his wife, even violently and by force, then, in the prevalent bourgeois mentality, he was only taking what was his anyway – much like a capitalist can do what he likes with what he owns. Also consider that Emma Goldman, in the same 1890s I have discussed in this book, saw marriage and prostitution as exactly the same thing from the woman's point of view for, in both, a woman was required to give over her sex in order to survive. We may see this as yet another form of the incarnated violence anarchists saw embedded all throughout bourgeois society.) Some of the anarchists above go so far as to advocate the dissolution of the traditional Western (for it is NOT a universal configuration) of the family, saying that children need not necessarily be looked after by their birth parents but that those who particularly love (looking after) children will do just as well. (Goldman, again, had similarly radical thoughts.) In all of these things the anarchists were seeking to work through their beliefs in a new configuration of human relationships which instantiated their values in ethical ways of relating and made impossible the incarcerating ones they sought to escape. And that fundamentally meant that women must be as free and equal as men, as autonomous and with as much agency to freely associate with others in their own lives.

13. At the end of the day, what my anarchists are saying here is that bourgeois society has created a prison in which to house the mass of society, the working mass from which any ultimate wealth (and the inequality and so power of some over others it creates)

derives. Only those with power over the organisation or direction of this prison have the power to designate its relationships and how it will operate. Everyone else, in order to survive in this situation, has to perform their designated function in exactly the form it has been delegated to them since this system of relationships is deliberately fixed in place in order to benefit those it serves. What the anarchists then did in this situation (exampled fairly well by those I chose to discuss above) was determine to resist, and revolt against, this formation of political and economic and morally constituted relationships AS A MATTER OF AN ANARCHY OF EXISTENCE, a will to self-maintain.

What do I mean by this? I mean that the anarchists complain that the capitalist authoritarianism of bourgeois society, a non-negotiable from the bourgeois point of view, is literally killing those within the bourgeois prison – and providing lives of abject incarcerated misery in the meantime. IT IS AN EXISTENTIAL ISSUE FOR THE ANARCHISTS – and in a way the bourgeois do not understand. The bourgeois, in the anarchist mind, effectively have a prison population they have put to work (as the modern USA does, in fact and in reality) and which they work to the bone without qualm. They use both carrot and stick to keep this situation fixed, proffering trinkets and possibilities in front to tempt the gullible and following up behind with an ever-present violence to remind the resistant of the consequences of resistance. If one prisoner complains too much they are dealt with – both in order to deal with them and as a lesson to the others. They are then replaced with the next incarcerated figure. These are not then people, human individuals with personalities, wants, needs, desires and wills, in terms of the bourgeois system and its operators, but merely resources, means to an end, sources of profit, “exploitees”. They are, as Michel Foucault explored in some of his historical work, numbers in a system in what increasingly becomes a managerial “biopolitics” where powerful others control

populations. The system, manipulated by its operators, does not care who you are. It cares only that you are made to fit within it to its continuing and efficient profit. So, most of all, you should “know your place”.

My anarchists above, however, look at this more personally, more existentially. Perhaps following the maxim of Jean-Paul Sartre, which had not yet been uttered while they lived (“existence precedes essence”), they put an individual’s life and will and expectation of self-maintenance BEFORE such a bourgeois system of relations. They insisted that what mattered FIRST OF ALL was that a person had their own life and their own will and their own means of survival and that this consisted of their own desires and their own proclivities as well. They insisted that not only should these things be taken into account in a social situation but that they should count MOST OF ALL in a social situation. They invented what I have called SOCIAL EGOISM and which others have more traditionally called “anarchism”. This was conceived of as a form of social cooperation based on personal autonomy, personal agency and free association (for example, by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon). Any sociality here was thus according to the proclivity of human beings themselves. This mentality spreading widely, coercive bodies or institutions became impossible because they simply ceased to exist. Any social power was cooperative power (as it is now – but only because cooperation is coerced) but its benefits were distributed to all rather than to a certain wealthy and powerful few.

I regard this as being something existentially derived for it was historically produced during the formative centuries of capitalism, from below, by those who suffered from the pernicious effects of capitalist exploitation and oppression. Much like the pirates I elsewhere take to be prime (if unrecognised) examples of anarchist formations,

anarchists were those who wanted to bail out of bourgeois society, refuse both its authority *and* its system of property, and take their lives in their own hands and for their own sakes. They saw no other way for it seemed to them, as it should still to us, ridiculous to imagine that the bourgeois would “come to their senses” when bourgeois sense is telling them that everything they do is both natural and normal and justifiable – and the singular viable means of social human existence. Capitalist authoritarians are those who imagine that the prison is the only way one can create a workable society. They can see no other alternative. Why they would they simply give up their control of it? For the anarchists, however, such as my examples here, it was then a case of “take your life in your own hands or suffer at the hands of others”. And, when you come to that way of thinking, it isn’t really a choice at all.

Epilogue

Four of the five men I have discussed above were put to death by the French state for living anarchist lives which embodied the values I have discussed here. Their heads were chopped off. No doubt the state concerned thought of them as “terrorists” and social dangers it was impossible to leave alive and no doubt the mainstream press did their collaborative work of propping up the state’s take on things as good members of the bourgeoisie. Duval, of course, would have suffered the same fate as the other four but while he was waiting in jail for it to be organised his sentence was commuted to a life of hard labour in a tropical prison on an island which was a French colony off the South American coast. It was probably imagined he would die there too (as at least 75% of those sent there did) but that was not to be his fate. Instead, he suffered through 14 years of hell and almost 20 escape attempts before one finally worked. From there he

escaped to New York (in a journey which took him the next two years). What all this raises in my mind, however, is the question of why people would endure lives (and deaths) like this for the sake of what, at first, might appear as merely ideological beliefs.

My answer to this is to question if they ever are “merely ideological beliefs”. For it seems to me that these beliefs – and the bourgeois ones which they oppose for that matter – are not “merely” anything. There is nothing “mere” about them for they are consequential worldviews. Thinking of the world one way necessitates one set of values, actions and relations. Thinking of the world another way mandates other values, actions and relations. There is nothing “mere” about this for it literally changes (our experience of) the world. The anarchist and bourgeois minds I have discussed here answer basic and fundamental questions about our experience of life itself. They answer, for example, the question: “How do you want to live?” No one has probably ever seriously asked you that question but an anarchist, not least an anarchist like me, thinks you should be asked it, in all seriousness, and thinks that your answer to it is both important and to be taken into account (not least by you yourself). So it might be many things to think a certain way and be possessed of (by?) a certain mind but “mere” is not one of them.

Anarchists, today as in the yesterday I have discussed above, are those who in fact believe that the “How do you want to live?” question is a very serious question indeed. It is the question all of them took seriously and found themselves needing to answer existentially in terms of the meanings of their whole lives (and sometimes their deaths too). So it probably makes sense for me to end this little historical and philosophical tour by asking the obvious question in their context:

HOW DO YOU WANT TO LIVE AND HOW DO YOU WANT TO DIE – AND WHAT ARE YOU
PREPARED TO DO ABOUT IT?

